

Agenda-Building in Local Land-Use Issues:
Blacksburg Versus the Big Box

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ABSTRACT

Like other communities across the country, Blacksburg, Virginia, has struggled with land-use policy, planning, and growth issues. This struggle intensified when town residents discovered a Walmart store might be included in a new retail development project. Local interest groups quickly formed, establishing different perspectives concerning the issue, while a Blacksburg Town Council member introduced an ordinance that would give the town the power to halt plans for the store. This measure became the focal point of the conflict, and groups both supporting and opposing it worked aggressively to gain community support for their respective sides of the issue. Using Cobb and Elder's (1983) agenda-building framework, the goal of this thesis is to examine the ways various groups involved in a local land-use conflict defined, and sometimes redefined, their messages to town residents in an effort to expand the issue beyond the core members of the groups to gain more widespread support. The results of these efforts are also evaluated. A case study was conducted using discourse analysis to examine group messages generated during the controversy. This study found that the way

an issue is defined could influence its progression and play an important role in its resolution. It also highlights definitive times during an issue's evolution that are critical to its progression. These findings demonstrate some of the benefits that can result from integrating effective issue management strategies into a communication program.

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&

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I. INTRODUCTION

Blacksburg, a small college town located in rural Southwest Virginia, has become a town politically divided over the past few years. As is the case with many towns across the country, Blacksburg residents have been involved in a struggle concerning land-use planning for the future of the community (Moxley, 2007a, May 29). While the tension has played a prominent role in several local political debates, the fragmentation of the community was the most apparent when prospects of a big box retail store setting up shop in the town came to light in 2007 (Moxley, 2007, April 10). Issue boundaries were quickly established and defined in a variety of ways—pro-growth versus anti-growth (Moxley, 2007, May 29a), economic prosperity versus stifled local revenue (Moxley, March 29, 2007), and independent stores versus big business (Moxley, 2007, May 29a). This was not just a land-use issue for the community, however. At the heart of this commercial development conflict were challenges to economic, social, and political ideologies. The local struggle reached its pinnacle when the Blacksburg Town Council considered Ordinance 1450—a measure that could give the town authority to stop plans for the officially unnamed big box retailer (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27). Groups supporting and opposing the ordinance both aggressively worked to promote their views and to garner community support through petitions, conducting door-to-door campaigns, speaking at council meetings, writing letters to local newspapers, and staging small protests (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 21).

Local land-use debates are increasingly related to the location of big box stores and contradict the traditional “growth model” outlined in the land-use planning literature (Halebsky, 2004). While these supersized retail establishments continue to expand, more

small towns and suburban areas will be forced to deal with the potential impacts of this growth and decide whether land-use policies should be used to shape the nature of this growth (Milne, 2005). While these debates have historically been defined as economic issues (Schneider, 1992), many of the fundamental elements of society, such as beliefs involving freedom, responsibility, growth, and community, serve as the foundation for these types of conflicts (Garkovich, 1982). The unique characteristics of debates over the construction of big box retailers are important to an understanding of contemporary political controversy and provide an opportunity for scholars to extend the pro-growth and anti-growth models of issue controversy. Thus, this debate in Blacksburg may be seen as representative of debates taking place across the nation. Central to the identification and resolution of contested issues, including those involving the future of local communities, is communication (Elder & Cobb, 1983).

Land-use issues are at the center of many controversies at the local government level, often receiving a great deal of attention from community interest groups (Adams, 2007). When individuals or groups begin to identify a situation as a potential problem, it becomes an issue (Cralle & Vibbert, 1985). The interactions of citizens and various groups with government officials in an effort to find some sort of agreement about an issue is an example of issue management (Heath, 1997). This is a complex process, however, because many of the participants involved do not view the issue in similar ways. For example, an issue seen as significant to one group may not seem as important to another. If the issue receives an adequate amount of attention from one or more groups, it can begin to follow a predictable path, which is referred to as an issue life cycle (Mahon & Waddock, 1992). A clear understanding of the way an issue progresses can

help organizations to identify when and how to respond to an issue, as well as the point when an issue has progressed too far to be effectively managed (Regester & Larkin, 2005). To make an impact at the government level, groups must push an issue through the life cycle to a more critical level of status, where government officials are forced to address the issue (Crale & Vibbert, 1985). Public interest is the key component for an issue's advancement, which ultimately draws government leaders into the conflict (Hainsworth, 1990). Defining and redefining an issue is an important part of an issue's development, as well as the way it is managed by organizations (Jacques, 2004). This is particularly true of political issues.

A struggle over what definition of an issue will be accepted is central to a political conflict, and those individuals and groups representing the side of an issue that attracts the most support is more likely to control the outcome (Cobb & Elder, 1983). In an attempt to gain this support, groups attempt to communicate an issue in ways to attract interest from those not previously involved, which is also referred to as issue expansion. Issue definition is an integral component of agenda-building theory, which involves the analysis of the ways different issues become important to different groups of people. The theory emphasizes a group of issue characteristics that are directly related to issue expansion. Groups can craft a desired definition of an issue by emphasizing some aspects, while excluding others (Rochefort & Cobb, 1994). An audience's response to the how these issue characteristics are presented can help determine issue salience (Cobb & Elder, 1983).

The goal of this research is to provide an in-depth look at the ways groups representing different sides of a conflictive issue create and communicate shared

meanings to expand interest in an issue beyond a core group of members to a more general audience, while simultaneously advancing a particular view of their community. This work aims to create a more complete understanding of how issues become part of a local public policy agenda by examining how certain issue characteristics can directly affect public interest and involvement and by looking closely at the techniques used to define and redefine an issue as it evolves, casting a light on the various influences involved in public policymaking, in an effort to determine why one side of an issue is successful at achieving its goals and another is not. The agenda-building perspective highlights the important contributions of the actions occurring before a policy decision is made by government officials (Cobb & Elder, 1983). It shows that the public's influence on policy formulation and the decision-making process is much more powerful than it may seem.

Not only will this project explore the ways groups create meaning for an issue to establish strong issue identification with community members, but it will attempt to describe and to explain the process of social action in a small community, which involves establishing a connection between what people believe and what they do. By creating a clearer picture of how groups cultivate shared meaning for an issue, a deeper understanding of social life can be found (Hall, 1972). Different social views involving goals, resources, rights, and status are at the heart of these controversial issues and can be found by looking at the various messages communicated by the groups involved (Garkovich, 1982). By defining an issue, group members are not only advancing a position, they are also communicating their vision for the community (Adams, 2007).

Issue Background

The Town of Blacksburg is part of Montgomery County, located in Southwest Virginia. It is home to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, more commonly known as Virginia Tech, which is the largest university in Virginia with a total enrollment of 29,898. The town has more than 43,000 residents and is the fifteenth largest municipality in the state (Town of Blacksburg, Government). The Blacksburg Town Council serves as the legislative body of the town's local government and is responsible for the approval of all ordinances and resolutions, annual budgets, tax rates, land use and zoning decisions, and long range plans and policies. Blacksburg's mayor serves as head of the council and is also a voting member of the group. Both the mayor and council members serve four-year terms, with the council consisting of seven (including the mayor) at-large seats (Town of Blacksburg, Our community).

While land-use issues are normally routine matters for council consideration, one of the most controversial for Blacksburg Town Council involved plans to build a sewer system in a rural part of the town called Tom's Creek (Gangloff, 2004, April 30). For more than 30 years, Blacksburg residents debated the need for the project, but it wasn't until 2003 when the town's sewers overflowed along two major roads that the council decided to take action, approving plans for a new sewer system in Tom's Creek to help alleviate the problem. The debate over the Tom's Creek Sewer project quickly drew opposition from environmentalists and smart growth advocates, who argued that the new system approved by the council would have severe environmental repercussions and open the door for high-density growth in the area. Near the height of the project's controversy, many of its critics came together to form Citizens First, a group dedicated to

environmental issues and open-government advocacy (Moxley, 2007, March 3). The group quickly became influential in the local political scene, endorsing three anti-sewer candidates who swept the 2006 council election, which garnered the town's largest voter turnout in 15 years (Thorton, 2005, May 26). The new council eventually stopped plans for the project, but the issue provided the foundation for an antigrowth platform that would play a major role in another controversial land-use issue.

Also in 2006, a partnership of local landowners received approval from council to redevelop 40 acres of land into a mixed-use retail and residential complex (Moxley, 2006, May 11). A representative described plans to develop a mixed commercial, residential, civic, and retail establishment with open public areas and urged council to approve the project quickly to aid in securing deals with potential tenants at an upcoming retailer meeting (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). After hearing hours of public comment about the project, including citizen concerns that the decision was being rushed, council voted 5 to 2 to approve the rezoning. Almost a year after this approval, the developer for the project, Fairmont Properties, unveiled plans that included a 175,000-square-foot retail building located on four acres of the development near an elementary school (Manese-Lee, 2007, March 29). Many local residents believed the footprint of the building, which was not included in the plans for the initial rezoning request, closely resembled a big box retail establishment and speculated that it was slated to become a Walmart Supercenter (Moxley, 2007, April 10). Two weeks after the developer's new site plans were submitted, Blacksburg Town Council member Don Langrehr proposed Ordinance 1450 (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27), which would require any developer constructing a retail building larger than 80,000 square feet within the town

limits to get special approval from the council (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, April 10). While developers could still receive approval for large-scale commercial projects, the measure would give council the authority to place restrictions on such projects or even reject them entirely. Council voted to send the proposal to the planning commission for review, while several council members expressed concern about passing the ordinance without proper examination (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27). Once again the town found itself involved in a controversy over land-use and town growth. This issue, however, seemed to rest squarely on the shoulders of Ordinance 1450.

Supporting Ordinance 1450 was Citizens First and Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth (BURG), a grassroots group formed to protect the town from big box retailers (Moxley, 2007, April 10). Four of the seven council members, including Blacksburg Mayor Ron Rordam, had at some point been endorsed by and received financial contributions from Citizens First (Moxley, 2006, December 9). The Downtown Merchants of Blacksburg, a group of local business owners, also informally supported the measure (Moxley, 2007, May 29b). Opposition came from the town's economic development organization, the Blacksburg Partnership, the developers for the project, and Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, a group of residents led by longtime Blacksburg Mayor Roger Hedgepeth, who retired from the position in the early stages of the big box controversy. In the middle of the conflict was the Blacksburg Town Council.

Before the council voted on the measure, the developers filed suit against the Town of Blacksburg, asking the court to protect its rights to build the large retail store based on previous rezoning approval (*Diversified Investors v. The Town Council*, 2007). On May 29, 2007, town council listened to more than 100 citizens during a five-hour

public hearing, before voting unanimously to approve Ordinance 1450 (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Two council members openly criticized the ordinance before ultimately casting their votes of approval. The Blacksburg Board of Zoning Appeals subsequently declared that the new ordinance could not be applied to the development, prompting the town and several area residents associated with the BURG group to jointly file suit, asking the local circuit court to reverse the decision (Hale v. Board of Zoning Appeals, 2007). After the court upheld the board's ruling, a long litigation process began, resulting in the Virginia Supreme Court ruling to uphold the town council's authority to apply Ordinance 1450 to the project and to require Fairmont Properties to apply for a special use permit to construct the store in Blacksburg (Town of Blacksburg v. Board of Zoning Appeals, 2009).

A range of individuals, groups, and elected officials, and eventually the judicial system, participated in the resolution of Ordinance 1450 and its application to the proposed development. The participants and processes are indicative of a political system based on the distribution of authority and influence used both for individual benefit and the public good. Scholars studying land-use planning and communication have identified evolving patterns of political participation to determine who really governs at the local level (Adams, 2007; Dahl, 1961; Logan & Molotch, 1987; Logan, Whaley, & Crowder, 1997). The next chapter presents the literature that forms the basis for this study and a description of the method of analysis used. Chapter III explores the ways the groups involved in the South Main Street project controversy attempted to expand the issue beyond their core members to other Blacksburg residents. The issue's journey through the stages of the issue life cycle is described and the messages presented throughout the

course of the controversy are evaluated to determine the consummate goal of each group, as well as how these groups utilized specific issue characteristics central to the agenda-building theory to expand the issue. The groups' issue expansion efforts are then evaluated by comparing the messages presented to residents' responses. The final chapter offers implications of the ideas detailed in this work and presents conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The Benefits of Issue Management

According to Crable and Vibbert (1985), an issue is born when people view a problem or situation as being significant, while Heath (1997) characterizes issue management as being “centered on the ability of activists, business entities and government agencies to find common ground and create wise public policy” (p. 301). This may be an important element of issue management, but that is not to say that this type of agreement always occurs. One possible reason for the inability of businesses, activist groups, and government leaders to achieve consensus is because not all issues are viewed as being equally important by each of these groups. While one group may see one issue as being very important and in need of action quickly, another group may not view that issue as significantly. In addition, there may be a divergence of potentially competing interests among the groups involved.

This idea is supported by Hainsworth (1990), who explains that one of the critical components of an effective issues management program is the understanding that issues evolve in a very predictable way. He describes an issue life cycle composed of four stages: origin, mediation and amplification, organization, and resolution. In the first stage, one or more publics identify with the issue and decide that it must be addressed, which signifies a conflict is developing. Groups then begin to emerge and opposing sides of the issue are created during the mediation and amplification stage. The author describes a steady increase of pressure being placed on organizations during this emerging stage to recognize and accept the issue. This amplification can also move the issue into the public policy arena, where “...legislation may be introduced, regulations

may be sought under existing law, or litigation may ensue” (p. 85). It is during this second stage of the issue life cycle when organizations can have the most substantial impact on the issue’s continued development. In the third phase of the cycle, the organization stage, positions become set, conflict emerges, and groups begin to look for some sort of resolution. Hainsworth (1990) explains that publics involved with an issue can change as it moves through the issue life cycle, but it is more important to focus on how these publics participate in the conflict, rather than who is part of a public’s membership. As these publics begin to communicate their issue positions, the conflict will receive more public attention. According to Hainsworth (1990), “Increased public attention motivates influential leaders to become part of the emerging conflict and pressure mounts on governmental bodies to seek a resolution to the conflict” (p. 86). The final stage in the issue life cycle, resolution, occurs when an issue receives the attention of public officials and formally enters the policy process, where the parties involved seek legislation or regulation.

Media coverage is an influential factor affecting issue progression. This coverage can play a substantial role in elevating the status of an issue, which creates a dependency on this kind of exposure to communicate messages to a large public, especially as the scope of the conflict expands (Cobb & Elder, 1983). More specifically, Hainsworth (1990) identifies media coverage as a powerful element in an issue’s development during this second stage of the cycle. Increasing coverage by trade and specialty publications can lead to mass media coverage, which could help catapult the issue directly into the public policy process. “It is also at this stage, while the issue is still in the specialized media and receiving sporadic coverage, that an organization can have its greatest impact on the

further development of an issue” (p. 85). Many individuals and groups involved with the issue will work diligently during this phase of the issue life cycle to gain media coverage, since this coverage can have such a tremendous impact on issue advancement (Register & Larkin, 2005). Cobb and Elder (1983) explain that once the media become involved with an issue, “...they will often play an important role in reinforcing or altering the prevailing definition of the conflict” (p. 143).

The path of the issue involving the Town of Blacksburg’s South Main Street development project can be traced using Hainsworth’s (1990) issue life cycle. A few concerns about the project were voiced when the project was originally being considered for approval in 2006 (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9), which corresponds with the first life cycle stage when issues originate and conflict begins to develop. The issue entered the mediation and amplification stage when concerns about a big box store intensified (Moxley, 2007, March 29), groups began taking sides on the issue (Moxley, 2007, April 10), local media coverage intensified (see Appendix H), and Ordinance 1450 was proposed (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27). The conflict reached its peak and groups on both sides of the issue focused on the ordinance, communicating their positions to the residents of the town (Blacksburg Partnership, May 27, 2007; Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 27; Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, 2007, May 27; Citizens First, May 8, 2007; Llamas, 2007, April 29), which signified the issue reaching the organization stage. The issue entered the resolution stage when Blacksburg Town Council voted to approve Ordinance 1450 and applied the measure to the South Main Street project (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27).

As Hainsworth (1990) demonstrates, the significance of an issue increases as it advances further through the stages of the cycle, as does the amount of pressure for an organization to respond. These levels of issue status are an example of an issue life cycle, which demonstrates the different development stages of an issue with the assumption that all issues follow the same path (Mahon & Waddock, 1992). As Renfro (1993) explains, “The life cycle of the issues in a system is a characteristic of the system itself rather than the issue” (p. 30). Issue life cycles are viewed as beneficial from a pragmatic perspective of issue management, because they can help practitioners predict how a current issue will develop based on how past issues have moved through the stages in the cycle (Bridges, 2004; Mahon & Waddock, 1992; Renfro, 1993). This information is a very important component of an organization’s issue management program, according to Regester and Larkin (2005), who explain that one of the goals of issue management is to identify potential changes, which provides organizations with the opportunity to attempt to influence decisions caused by those changes before they have a negative effect on the organization. The authors state:

Issue management involves looking into the future to identify potential trends and events that *may* influence the way an organization is able to operate but which currently *may* have little real focus, probably no sense of urgency and an unclear reference of time. (Regester and Larkin, 2005, p. 42)

The authors present several case studies that demonstrate how failing to use effective issue management techniques can lead to negative impacts on organizations’ reputations, as well as increased regulation and expense. Through their case studies, Regester and Larkin (2005) also highlight possible triggers for issue management, which include the

possibility of new legislation being introduced, a certain claim being made through the media, the publishing of research, or a change in the performance of behavior of an organization.

Understanding the issue life cycle can help organizations better identify potential issues and points in the evolution of an issue when a certain action or response is needed (Regester & Larkin, 2005). In the first stage of an issue, for example, organizations can begin to identify conditions or events that have the potential to develop into something important. While it still may be difficult to assess the importance or potential importance of an issue in the second stage, mediation and amplification, intervention on the part of an organization to prevent or rectify the issue remains a fairly simple matter. If an organization is effectively monitoring their environment for potential issues, this second stage in an issue's evolution is the opportune time to begin developing an action plan, before an issue enters the organization stage when it increases in intensity and becomes difficult to affect or contain. Once an issue progresses to the final stage and receives attention from public officials, resolution becomes a very costly matter on many different levels. As Regester and Larkin (2005) explain, "It should be remembered that the longer the issue survives, the fewer choices are available and the more it costs" (p. 67).

According to Crable and Vibbert (1985), since issues have different levels of importance, or status, for those involved, another goal of issue management is "...to understand the 'perceived' level of status that the issue holds for important publics and to move judges toward the 'desired' level of status by communicative intervention" (p. 5). The authors emphasize the difference between issue and policy management. While with issue management, issues are evaluated at any of the levels of importance, "Policy

management awaits the formulation of the answers to current and critical issues” (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985, p. 7). Based on this concept, it can be concluded that before a stakeholder group can truly become influential at the government level, they must first move an issue up the ladder of issue status to the current or critical level (organization stage). Along these same lines, if a group does not want public policy action taken on an issue, they must try to keep an issue at potential or imminent status (the origin or mediation and amplification stages). A solid understanding of this can help groups more effectively advance an issue of concern to the point that organizations are forced to respond to it. This can also help organizations to better control a situation, keeping potentially harmful issues contained.

While a comprehensive view of how an issue evolves from the point when it originates, to an emerging conflict, to the height of conflict, and, finally, to the point when it demands resolution, is the foundation for an effective issues management strategy (Hainsworth, 1990), Jaques (2004) points out that many issue management programs move from early identification of an issue to the development of objectives without giving enough attention to the critical time period when issues are being defined. He explains:

Proper identification is a vital foundation for effective issue management, and it is essential for issue managers to appreciate not only the principles by which they should attempt to understand, define and name their own issue, but also to recognize and combat the techniques often used by opponents in an attempt to redefine the issue to their competing agenda. (p. 191)

There are many opportunities for definition throughout the development of an issue, including the origin stage when an issue starts to gain a definition as a result of groups becoming aware and concerned about it (Regester & Larkin, 2005). According to Jacques (2004), it is imperative that organizations involved with a blossoming issue establish an issue definition early to form a foundation for strategy that could possibly follow. It is equally important to be aware of groups representing other interests involving the issue, he explains, referring specifically to activist groups, including those groups originally formed to address a single issue, such as BURG. These groups can be very adept at creating or changing definitions to gain and retain control of an issue. According to Heath (1997), these groups redefine an issue to provide a new interpretation and, “If the reinterpretation catches on, especially with reporters and followers, the company, industry or agency has become vulnerable to change” (p. 194). The defining and redefining of an issue is a critical component of its development, and the process of managing it, as Jacques (2004) suggests, and it is of particular importance in the political arena.

Symbols in Politics

According to Elder and Cobb (1983), communication is the central component of the political process, while symbols are the way in which this communication is delivered. Symbols are the result of the assignment of meaning or value to objects, people, things, or ideas (Cobb and Elder, 1973). As Elder and Cobb (1983) explain:

To understand what is communicated to who, it is necessary to inquire into the symbols that characterize this political culture. Of interest is not only the nature of

the symbols themselves but also the way they are used and how people relate to them. (p. 9)

This is the case for politics in general, as well as its specific components, including public policy making. The interactions that occur during this process are just as important as the results, and information about the dynamics of political behavior, including the process of collective action, can be found by examining the symbols involved (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Many components of the process of social action hinge on political leaders' effective use of symbols to gain support for an issue. This is especially true for interest groups trying to form a coalition of supporters (Graber, 1976). While certain symbols are common to various groups, the meanings attached to them will vary for each person.

Because many people create their own meanings for these symbols, it is possible to use one symbol to appeal to many people with different interests, which often means that the larger the political movement, the more broad the symbols used will be. How successful a symbol will become for a movement depends more on how people relate to it, rather than what it actually means. Symbols can serve as a focal point around which people band together or join groups and they often play an important role in social conflicts (Cobb and Elder, 1983).

A struggle between interested parties over what symbolic definition of an issue will be accepted is not only a critical component of political conflict, but often a key part of the eventual resolution (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Rochefort and Cobb (1994) discuss the implications of problem definition. The way a problem is defined, including what aspects of the situation are emphasized or downplayed, can help push an issue to the forefront of a public policy agenda and lay the groundwork for an eventual solution. As

Elder and Cobb (1983) explain, “Those whose definition attracts the greatest and most intense support are likely to prevail” (p. 129). A framework for analysis is needed, however, to provide an effective way for uncovering how people use symbols to define an issue and gain support for their definition (Cobb & Elder, 1983).

Agenda-Building Theory

Cobb and Elder (1983) developed the agenda-building theory of group participation and influence to provide researchers with a framework for the examination of the ways different public policy issues become important to different people through the construction and characterization of symbols. The goal of their approach is to show how some issues become part of a government agenda, while others may never be considered. By providing a process to uncover the connection between issue characteristics and public interest and involvement, the agenda-building theory helps researchers evaluate how and why issues find a place on an agenda.

The most direct way for an issue to get the attention of decision makers is to be placed on the systematic agenda of controversy, where those issues that are identified as being in need of action by the political community and as legitimate by government leaders can be found (Cobb & Elder, 1983). It is these issues that will then move to the formal agenda, which is a collection of issues slated for serious consideration by policymakers. To reach agenda status, an issue must gain the interest of some key government officials, since they have the final word concerning which issues reach the agenda. “To reach the formal agenda, an issue should evoke a response on the mass level, since visibility helps a dispute gain the attention of political decision-makers,” (Cobb &

Elder, 1983, p. 161). To cultivate the interest of the general public, "...the issues must be highly generalized and symbolic" (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 107). How an issue is presented plays an integral role in this process, directly affecting many other factors such as the prominence and awareness of and identification with the issue, media coverage of the issue, and the ways in which the issue reaches government officials.

Even at the local level, there are always a number of demands swirling around in communities hoping to gain the attention of government officials. While some work examines the ways groups try to directly influence policymakers (Adams, 2007), Cobb and Elder (1983) view this process as much more indirect. They claim for an issue to reach the policy agenda, it must garner the attention of individuals or groups not previously involved, which gives the issue more merit. This is described as issue expansion. "We consider an issue to be expanded to a 'public' when people within that public are aware that the issue is contested and are positively or negatively attracted to it" (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 111). The outcome of a conflict is directly related to involvement, with successful issue expansion often translating into political power (Schattschneider 1960). The way a conflict is communicated can determine whether those previously uninterested in the issue will choose to become involved at some level. As Rochefort and Cobb (1994) explain, "Whoever can control this expansion, whether by accelerating or limiting it, gains the political upper hand" (p. 5). Organized interest groups attempt to gain this control through the process of defining the issue. Groups will define and redefine an issue to gain the support of specific groups and the general public. By using generic symbols, the goal is to appeal to a general public composed of people whose specific thoughts may be different, but overall perceptions of an issue are very

compatible (Cobb and Elder, 1973). Without these symbols, Graber (1976) argues, most politically involved groups would not be effective because of their inability to create group cohesion.

Cobb and Elder's (1983) agenda-building perspective emphasizes issue expansion. At the core of this framework is a group of characteristics necessary to issue expansion. Groups representing each side of an issue use a variety of tactics to communicate in ways that are most beneficial for them, which often involves appeals to a more general public audience. This is consistent with Edelman's (1964) description of hortatory language, which is used when trying to persuade others, particularly the general public, to support a specific policy. The foundation of this language style is the idea that widespread public support is needed for an issue because of the important role the public plays in the political process. Reinforcing this perspective, Cobb and Elder (1983) explain that as the number of people that are made aware of an issue increases, so does the probability it will be placed on the formal agenda. The expansion of an issue, of course, hinges on the way it is defined. Edelman (1964) explains that in most situations, people or groups obtain what they want by using force, but in political situations, language is the method used to achieve goals. Defining issues in an effort to gain public interest rests on the use of language, which can help legitimize one side of an issue while possibly weakening the legitimacy of another (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). Issues can be very complex and involve many elements. By choosing which aspects of an issue to emphasize, as well as which factors to exclude, a carefully crafted view of the issue can be presented. According to Edelman (1964), "...meanings conveyed to mass publics are consistently different from those reflected in the responses of small, immediately

involved groups...” (p. 149). Cobb and Elder (1983) identify several issue characteristics that contribute to better opportunities for expansion—specificity, social significance, temporal relevance, complexity, and categorical precedence. The audience’s response to these characteristics helps determine the salience of the issue.

The specificity of the issue, meaning how broadly or narrowly the issue is defined, will have an effect on how an issue expands (Cobb and Elder, 1983). If an issue can be defined to appeal to as many people as possible, more people will be able to identify with the issue and potentially support a cause. Ambiguity is one of the hallmarks of Edelman’s (1964) hortatory language. This language style involves appeals for public support through the use of very vague terms, such as “justice” and “public interest.” He claims these appeals are effective because most people think in and have a strong response to over simplified terms, which allows individuals to infer their own meanings about an issue. The use of such broad language makes it easier for individuals to find a component within the issue the he or she can identify with (Cobb and Elder, 1983).

The same is true for social significance. If a group can convince the public that an issue will have a significant impact on a substantial portion of the community, the more people who will decide to become involved (Cobb and Elder, 1983). This is also referred to as situational relevance, which simply means the more concern someone has about a situation, the more relevant the situation will become (Elder & Cobb, 1983). Situational relevance usually involves proximity, whether physical or social. Social proximity is normally based on how an individual relates to a group. If a situation is seen as directly impacting a person or those a person identifies with, it can be considered relevant. A person can also be convinced that a situation is personally significant. A person’s

worldview can affect what he or she considers to be relevant. Once situational relevance is established, the more confident a person is of this relevance, the greater the likelihood of response to a symbol. If more than one definition of a symbol is presented, a person is more likely to accept the definition that he or she sees as most important.

Temporal relevance can also impact issue expansion (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Demonstrating an issue's long-term impact can help determine how the public will respond to the issue. "Issues that are going to have implications above and beyond the resolution of the particular issue at one point in time and one level in government are temporarily relevant" (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 98). Temporal relevance can also be demonstrated by highlighting additional long-term consequences related to the issue or similar issues that could be affected in the future.

The complexity of an issue's definition is also a characteristic linked to issue expansion (Cobb and Elder, 1983). The more simple and non-technical the public views an issue to be, the more appeal the issue will have. Even complex issues can be defined as simple ones if discussion can be guided from the complex aspects of the issue to the direct impacts on individuals.

Finally, categorical precedence is highlighted as an issue expansion characteristic (Cobb and Elder, 1983). If an issue has not been dealt with before or resolved in a similar way, the better the chance a group will have to expand the issue. Of course, as Rochefort and Cobb (1994) point out, when an issue is labeled as unprecedented it can gain attention, but issues that are unfamiliar can be difficult to understand and prove to be difficult for formulating solutions.

Along with these five issue characteristics, Cobb and Elder (1983) also identify the use of emotional symbols, as well as media coverage, as factors affecting issue expansion. While evaluating varying conditions under which people will respond strongly to symbols, Edelman (1964) concludes that those exposed to emotional messages are more likely to become invested in the situation and develop an interest. He attributes this response to social factors that affect large groups of people, explaining, “They acquire political meaning as group phenomena” (Edelman, 1964, p. 34). As with ambiguous language, emotional appeals increase the likelihood that individuals will create their own meaning that may have more personal value. These perceptions, “...usually involve fundamental social values and are fraught with emotions; once these emotions have been stirred, particularly in a mass setting where the sense of sharing intensifies feelings, it becomes comparatively easy to induce mass actions” (Graber, 1976, p. 318-319).

The media can also help push an issue onto a government agenda (Cobb and Elder, 1983). If groups can receive media coverage of their side of the issue, they are more likely to reach a larger audience with their message. “Symbolic crusades, regardless of their form, are dependent on publicity so as to attract additional people or to give credibility to an issue commitment” (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 150). Symbols reinforce arousal and the media play an important role in this process, generating and intensifying interest for the issue through its coverage. A group must generate some initial attention for the issue before the media will decide to cover it, however. By using emotional symbols and establishing significance and public relevance for an issue, groups can define an issue as being newsworthy.

Davis (1995) uses the agenda-building perspective, specifically the aforementioned ways communication can be used to expand a policy issue, to analyze the strategies used by interest groups at odds over an environmental policy issue involving Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest. He found this framework useful for exploring how groups, regardless of available resources, were able to communicate a particular view of the issue, as well as the results of these efforts. He explains that the quality of each group's message, as well as the ways it was communicated, were just as important as material resources and helped both sides effectively expand their versions of the issue. Issue expansion was found to be a priority for both environmentalists and timber interests, with both sides striving to manipulate the issue characteristics central to the agenda-building theory, including issue breadth, issue significance, issue complexity, and the emotional element of issues. While each group attempted to expand their side of the issue in different ways, Davis found that both sides were effective at achieving expansion. With various groups competing for power and attention involving policy issues, just as the author demonstrates with the Siskiyou National Forest environmental policy issue, it is imperative to have a firm grasp on the complexities of local political influence to develop a more complete understanding of how communication fits in the process.

Political Influence

In his seminal study of pluralist politics, "Who Governs?" Dahl (1961) asked, "In a political system where every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually

governs?” (p. 1). Through his examination of the political process in New Haven, Connecticut, he found that a small group of local leaders had tight control over policy decisions, especially those involving development issues, yet it wasn't clear who or what was influencing these leaders. Dahl identified several groups that attempted to influence these policymakers and found that many times these groups had very different interests and attempted to become part of the political process in a wide variety of ways. One of these groups, which the author described as the “political stratum,” was actively involved in local political issues because of its abundant resources, including wealth, social standing, and occupation. According to Dahl, while this group did have firm footing in the political process, it was not the ultimate influence involving local issues. He identified average citizens as an important group in local politics. As he explained, “Though wage-earners lack social standing, they are not without other resources, including the ballot, and what they lack as individuals they more than make up in collective support” (p. 233). Although he admitted that those with lower incomes lack material resources, he found that both groups are of fairly equal standing within the political process—average voters have strength in numbers, while the elites have more wealth-based power.

Dahl (1961) discovered that the small group of powerful leaders making important decisions for the city, including New Haven's mayor, made these decisions based on what they believed the members of the political stratum and average voters would accept. The author claimed that by paying close attention to voting patterns in past elections, the mayor and other leaders could determine what kinds of policies their constituents would be more likely to support. As he stated:

For nearly every citizen in the community has access to unused political resources; it is precisely because of this that even a minor blunder can be fatal to the political entrepreneur if it provokes as sizeable minority in the community into using its political resources at a markedly higher rate in opposition to his policies... (p. 309)

He concluded that when a considerable portion of the electorate opposes a policy, officials will seriously reconsider a position and either change the position or work diligently to find a compromise. While trying to answer his question of who really governed New Haven, Dahl found that the average citizen has more power than he or she may realize. This idea is reinforced by Cobb and Elder's (1983) claim that widespread support is needed for public policy issues to get the attention of local decision makers.

Dahl's findings involving local political influence are quite different from those of Molotch (1976), however, who claims that local policymakers are controlled by a small group of elite citizens. According to him, the pursuit of intensive growth is the driving political force in local government, with many officials gauging their political success by how much economic development occurs during their time in office. This gives those who control the land in a community a great deal of power, making them prominent political players. He explains that a locality's main responsibility is to act as a growth machine, using land to its fullest potential and often at the expense of residents. He argues, "I aim to make the extreme statement that this organized effort to affect the outcome of growth distribution is the essence of local government as a dynamic political force" (p. 313). Growth is the most important issue for this group of elites because as growth increases, so does the group's wealth, which is why it uses the bulk of its local

influence in an area where it has a great deal at stake—land use decisions. This powerful group is not representative of the population of a locality, according to Molotch, yet the kinds of growth decisions that it influences have a direct impact on residents' lives. He states, "...local growth is a transfer of quality of life and wealth from the local general public to a certain segment of the local elite" (p. 320).

Other work supports the conclusion that local governments identify growth as a priority. Swanstrom (1985) discusses growth politics, defining it as the way local governments make the most of their land to make it attractive to developers, investors, and other land-based elites. Using Lincoln, Nebraska, as a case study, Oyinlade and Haden (2004) uncovered a reciprocal relationship between local government and businesses, with officials turning to business owners for campaign contributions and the owners using these contributions to gain influence in local policy decisions. According to Logan, Whaley, and Crowder (1997), while some case studies have shown that the amount of power pro-growth coalitions have in localities varies, others have found that growth is absolutely a high priority issue because of its importance in political campaigns, contribution to conflicts for government administration, and impact on various political issues. In addition, local governments and many residents view growth as important because they believe it provides a strong tax base, which can result in improved services and even lower local taxes (Schneider, 1992). Schneider and Teske (1993) concluded that, "As a result, the power of the growth machine and its influence over local policies has become a 'given' in the study of local politics" (p. 720). Even though growth machine theory portrays residents as detached, weak individuals who are no match for a powerful group of business elites, some work points to a shift in power

from a few privileged citizens to groups of residents concerned about the impacts of growth (Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990).

The Rise of Antigrowth Movements

Molotch (1976) does discuss the emergence of antigrowth movements, especially as growth has become less important for localities and the consequences of growth, such as pollution, increased traffic, and other environmental issues, have become more important. He explains that when this happens:

We can expect that the local business elites—led by land developers and other growth-coalition forces—will tend to withdraw from local politics. This vacuum may then be filled by a more representative and, likely, less reactionary activist constituency. p. 329

Other work has shown that land use issues serve as major conflicts for local governments, in part because of the efforts of antigrowth movements to challenge the local growth machine (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990; Logan et al., 1997; Logan & Zhou, 1989). “The advocates and opponents of growth in general, and of particular development projects, recognize that they have a stake in the future of the locality and act collectively and politically to support their vision” (Logan and Zhou, 1989, p. 468).

Logan and Molotch (1987) continued the discussion from Molotch’s (1976) previous work involving growth as an important local policy issue, and also recognized residents as a potential force in the political process. According to the authors:

Because the competition for growth does not ordinarily work on their behalf, residents often use organization of their own to sustain the places in which they

live. Maintenance of “home” in the largest sense of the term motivates people to come together in block clubs, neighborhood groups, and other associations that have place-related use values as at least one of their central concerns. (p. 37)

For example, neighborhood associations, which are one type of active organized groups that can help catalyze local antigrowth movements, were found to most likely be formed over a single issue, such as controversies involving land use changes or creating commercial zoning near residential space (Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990).

Different types of neighborhoods have their own economic or political standing within a community, and wealthy neighborhoods can become important political players, due to resources and potential partnerships with local businesses (Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990). Business owners often join the same side of an issue with these groups because of their desire to maintain the character of upper-class neighborhoods. The more wealthy residents in a community, the higher the values of retail establishments climb. Lifestyle is important for these kinds of residents, and they are not willing to sacrifice their quality of life for additional growth (Logan and Molotch, 1987). If there are enough of these like-minded residents in an area, they could prove to have substantial influence in the local political process. “These people have strong organizational skills and high rates of political participation, which they put to use in resisting the fiscal and social costs of development” (Logan and Molotch, 1987, p. 218). This is especially true when land development issues become a major source of contention. The situation becomes a clash between wealthy developers and affluent residents, with enough resources on both sides of the issue to fund costly court battles if necessary.

According to Logan et al. (1997), while not every community is dominated by pro-growth policy, there are numerous factors involved in the struggle between those that support and oppose growth and many of these factors can affect the success of antigrowth movements. While it has long been assumed that growth equates to lower taxes and improved services for a locality, Schneider (1992) found that many times there are more costs associated with growth than benefits. He explained that when economic growth resulted in lower costs and more benefits, residents would be more likely to support pro-growth policies. When the opposite was true, however, "...they reduced their support for development policies, providing a growing popular base for an invigorated antigrowth movement" (p. 229).

Conflicts over growth are not just an economic issue for localities, however. According to Garkovich (1982), "...land use issues strike at the heart of critical dimensions of the social definition of reality: public versus private rights and responsibilities, values on freedom, progress, and growth, and consensual perceptions of the nature of the community" (p. 49). Molotch (1976) describes specific areas where antigrowth movements could achieve some amount of power, including in places with high amenity value and areas with nearby universities. Logan et al. (1997) also identify several characteristics contributing to an environment where antigrowth efforts are more likely to develop, including communities with high levels of socioeconomic status and those experiencing an environmental threat. Other studies agree, reaffirming these characteristics and identifying others that increase the probability that an antigrowth movement will form and have momentum in a community, such as the presence of an existing antigrowth group or some kind of active organized group (Clark and Goetz,

1994), residents with sufficient opportunities and political interest to mobilize (Burbank, Heying, and Adranovich, 2000), and localities that have a hierarchal government (Clark and Goetz, 1994). In addition, groups that support land use planning to help preserve the way of life in a community will most likely emerge in rural areas that begin to experience growth (Graber, 1974). The Town of Blacksburg is located in a rural area in Virginia that has been surrounded by neighboring areas' retail growth in recent years (Manese-Lee, May 22, 2006). The town features higher average family incomes (Blacksburg Partnership, Montgomery County Income) and education levels (Blacksburg Partnership, Population Statistics) compared to nearby communities and it serves as the home of the state's largest university (Town of Blacksburg, 2009b). In addition, it has been shown that activist groups can be successful in the town (Moxley, 2006, December 9). Political action group Citizens First has a reputation in the town of helping council candidates win elections by providing endorsements and financial support. It has also been credited with helping to increase the number of voters in town elections.

National issues and the composition of local leadership can also contribute to the creation and support of an antigrowth movement, while how severe residents view the situation, as well as how powerful their demand for government action is, can help predict the support of antigrowth policies (Baldassare and Protash, 1982). According to Burbank et al. (2000), opposition to pro-growth policies will most often result from groups of residents who are negatively affected by a particular project.

While it has been shown that antigrowth movements can impact local policy, the process is usually not an easy one. Research has uncovered difficulties these groups may face when battling against potential economic development in a community (Burbank et

al., 2000). Schneider and Teske (1993) pointed to problems created when groups act collectively on an issue to challenge a very stable local policy system as a major obstacle for antigrowth efforts. They also highlight the important role an antigrowth entrepreneur can play in the struggle with local government officials to help overcome some of these obstacles. As they explained, “The antigrowth entrepreneur can be a catalyst in this situation by providing the incentives and rhetoric to mobilize a diffuse constituency and introducing a new policy dimension into the local political arena to destabilize the pro-growth consensus” (p. 725). Adams (2007) referred to policy entrepreneurs as those who help encourage political participation of residents by giving context to issues, as well as contributing to the policy solutions and creating opportunities for participation. Clark and Goetz (1994) explained that an antigrowth movement could be strengthened if an antigrowth supporter becomes a member of local government leadership. According to Adams (2007), “By putting an issue on the agenda, developing a strategy for addressing it, and mobilizing interested citizens, policy entrepreneurs create an opportunity to influence local policy that was previously lacking” (p. 11). Blacksburg Town Council member Don Langrehr can be classified as an antigrowth entrepreneur in the Blacksburg community. He has been actively involved in Blacksburg politics even before being elected to council and a vocal proponent of smart growth initiatives in the town (Moxley, 2007, May 29a). He proposed Ordinance 1450 and successfully lobbied for its approval, which helped the town stop the South Main Street project developer’s inclusion of a big box store (Moxley, 2007, March 29).

The most common tool used by local governments to place restrictions on development is zoning requirements, such as Ordinance 1450 (Logan and Zhou, 1989). In

many instances, it is these requirements that become the center of local conflict. Many of the characteristics identified as contributing to an increase in the mobilization of antigrowth movements are also related to a higher incidence of restrictive growth policies in a locality, as are places that have recently experienced high rates of growth (Logan et al., 1997). Richer (1995) found that growth control measures were more likely to be implemented in localities where property owners will receive the most benefits, including increases in property values. Local officials normally do not introduce growth restriction policies without careful consideration, however, and many times these measures do not have a noticeable impact, because by the time they are passed, the project is too far along to be affected by the restrictions or they are adopted only to appease a concerned public (Logan and Zhou, 1989). Warner and Molotch (1995) examined several communities in Southern California and found that despite the presence of tight growth control measures implemented by localities, growth was still happening. These measures didn't limit development but made public benefits from growth a bigger priority for policy makers. The authors identified several factors that could affect the influence of growth restrictions, including whether governments use them as symbolic politics (regulations without consequence), only use them sporadically, use some policies to restrict development and others to encourage it, and create possible opportunities for other parties to take advantage of loopholes or completely ignore policies. Although growth machine theory shows that local governments will most often welcome growth to localities, this may not be the case with some types of development.

Superstores and the Growth Machine

While research on the relationship between the growth machine and antigrowth movements, as well as the strength of each, is fragmented, Halebsky (2004) identified superstores as one type of retail development that should not be a source of contention between the two groups because these types of companies are not pursued by the growth machine. Superstores, also known as big box stores, are large-scale, freestanding retail establishments that are usually part of a national chain, such as Walmart and Home Depot. Plans to include a big box store, rumored to be a Walmart, was the catalyst for the South Main Street development conflict (Moxley, 2007, April 10).

It would seem that the growth machine model would support new retail development, since it is assumed that it would contribute to more growth but, as Halebsky (2004) explained, the model is focused more on new manufacturing-based development. Most retail establishments cater to customers already living in an area and do not bring new money into a locality to contribute to the area's growth. In some cases, new retail can take business away from existing commercial areas. Halebsky found that the growth machine was not even a primary player in local debates about superstores.

According to the author:

Not keen to welcome mass retail, the growth machine is not engaged in actively preparing the ground for capital, one of its key functions according to the growth machine model. That function, however, has not disappeared, but has been taken over by an array of cosmopolitan firms that are engaged in real estate development on a regional, national, and international level. (p. 126)

More simply put, profit—not growth—is the motivation for superstores, which is the primary reason it is not supported by the growth machine model.

In Halebsky's (2004) work, which looked specifically at Walmart stores, it was found that many local politicians do not support the retail giant because it does not bring the new tax revenue and jobs that many supporters claim and only contributes to a redistribution of taxes and jobs already present within a locality. Halebsky found that, in place of the usual conflict found in the growth machine model that pits the growth machine against residents, the possible introduction of a superstore in an area leads to conflicts between small retailers and the superstore, as well as residents and the superstore. The desire of mass retail and its supporters (e.g., developers, real estate companies, etc.) to expand market share often results in its intrusion in areas that it has no particular attachment to, including neighborhoods. Many residents, however, have an interest in preserving these types of spaces. "This push into as many locations as possible is accompanied by a high degree of rationalization, which accounts for many of the negative effects that residents find objectionable (e.g., inappropriate site, lack of architectural refinement, low wages, etc.)" (p. 128). Conflicts can even develop among residents, especially between those residents that place a high value on shopping and those more dedicated to preserving certain community characteristics. Halebsky found that working class residents tended to be Walmart supporters, yet many middle and upper class citizens fall into the shopper category and are dedicated to more high-end stores. This can lead to conflict among residents involving what kind of retail development would be desirable. Regardless of the different conflict scenarios that can arise with a potential retail development, Halebsky explained, "As retailing has taken over increasing

expanses of urban space, retail development has become linked to a number of social problems and has led to distinctly political confrontations” (p. 131). It is these types of issues, which residents may view as having a negative effect on their community, that inspire residents to get involved.

Issue Involvement

While even supporters of growth machine theory agree that residents play a role in local land issues, although the extent of that role varies widely, additional aspects to be considered include why and how residents get involved in local issues. Adams (2007) found in his case study of Santa Ana, California, that residents assume a position very similar to that of a lobbyist. He explained:

Although they differ from conventional lobbyists in that they are not paid by a third party for their services, their engagement in the policy-making process is the same: they identify issues of importance to them, develop political goals, and engage in a variety of political activities to accomplish those goals. (p. 8)

Adams showed that residents were more likely to participate in issues that would have a clear and direct impact on their lives, not necessarily the ones considered most important, because this helps them to determine whether a certain policy is worth their time and effort of involvement. He found that traffic and land use issues received the most attention from citizens and that residents were also more willing to become active participants in issues influenced by social conflicts. For example, in Santa Ana the major social conflict involved how different groups of residents saw the future of the city. Thus, residents were more likely to get involved with issues that they thought would affect their

particular vision. This was also the conclusion of Garkovich's (1982) work, which focused on the debate over land use planning and zoning in a rural area, revealing how a community responds to the social changes that growth can produce. According to the author, a land use plan reflects the way a community sees itself, with the development of this plan, including zoning ordinances, symbolizing the social order of an area. This explains why competing interests get involved in this process, because each group wants its community to reflect its values. Zoning restrictions spark involvement from groups interested in specific issues, such as those affecting property or socioeconomic position.

Involving how citizens participate in local issues, Adams (2007) highlighted attending and speaking at public hearings, as well as involvement in social networks as being very integral parts of this process. After interviewing residents, Adams found that, "Respondents used the opportunity to speak at public meetings to accomplish a range of political goals, such as embarrassing elected officials, persuading them on the merits, agenda setting, and delaying decisions" (p. 137). Adams also argued that social networks could be an invaluable resource for citizens, contributing to the success of their efforts just as much as time or money. He found that Santa Ana residents took full advantage of social networks, using them to bring citizens together, communicate important information, share resources, and provide input to local policymakers. The citizens actually relied on social networks more than local media outlets for information about policy issues because they believed the information was more valuable. These networks helped various groups working to influence the same issue to connect and work together towards the same goal. The Internet helps support these social networks, serving as a tool citizens and activist groups can use for mobilization.

Through the Internet, groups can communicate directly with citizens, making the need for media coverage to relay their message less important and serving as a way to provide large amounts of information in a variety of formats (Coombs, 1998). While some work recognizes the Internet as a useful tool for helping activist groups communicate with other stakeholders to strengthen its network (Coombs, 1998) and build support (Mann, 1995), "...research data confirming the Internet's ability to mobilize large segments of previously disengaged citizens are nonexistent..." (Coombs, 1998, p. 519). While there are many ways for citizens to participate in local issues, it is important that they are motivated to get involved, which may be why many groups involved in local politics focus much of their effort on defining an issue as being relevant to as many people as possible.

"Sharing the Issue" Definition

Trying to convince residents to support a cause or, more specifically, accept a particular reality, represents the heart of the political process, which, according to Hall (1972), is "...to necessitate the creation and application of a norm" (p. 49) through negotiation. He explained that this is achieved through communication.

The maintenance and activation of power come from being able to convince others of the correctness of your position, of being able to appeal to those symbols which strike and resonance, of presenting one's self in the appropriate and desired style. (Hall, 1972, p. 51).

Groups that can convince others to share their definition of reality are able to control their actions. More specifically, Hall explained, groups can mobilize support by using symbols

to help its audience better understand its ideas and actions. The kind of action a group wants from its audience (e.g., joining an organization, signing a petition, voting a certain way, etc.) will determine what kinds of symbols are used. According to Hall:

The form of symbolic belief system called an *ideology* should be viewed as an action system because its function is to turn listeners into believers and believers into actors. The acceptance of an ideology constitutes a commitment to a new social cosmology and the rejection of current standards of reality. (p. 59)

The negotiating process is not simple, however. According to Sewell and Coppock (1977), “Even if planners, politicians and administrators are prepared to accept a role as providers of what the public wants, there are major problems reconciling the interests and objectives of different groups” (p. 10). When a conflict begins over a land use issue, the principal players on both sides, as well as the arguments and the issue in question, can shift. Ley and Mercer (1980) found that the kinds of groups interested in an issue could change over time and warned that many factors can contribute to the complexity of resolving a conflict. Often there is no clear winner in a land use conflict, with deals being made and long-term effects and goals being unclear. Results can cause factions in interest groups and large portions of the community. As the authors explained, “...once in its geographical context, an apparently discrete conflict shatters into a web of evolving and contingent relationships” (p. 106).

Research on the various influences in the public policy making process, especially involving debates surrounding land-use issues, shows how competing interests battle to have their interests heard by government officials, as well as the many obstacles they may face during this process. Because of the wide range of interests of antigrowth

groups, mobilizing residents to face the growth machine is not an easy task, especially when compared to the quick and efficient ways their opposition (developers and business owners) can organize (Schneider and Teske, 1993). The agenda-building theory can serve as a tool for researchers to show the ways these groups can gain support from a public with wide and varied interests (Cobb & Elder, 1983). To analyze how groups involved in a policy conflict create meanings for an issue with the overall goal of achieving public awareness and identification, this work uses specific issue characteristics identified by Cobb and Elder as being linked to issue expansion. How each group defined its messages are compared to the dimensions of specificity, social significance, temporal relevance, complexity, and categorical precedence. Media coverage and the use of emotional appeals, which the authors identify as an important component in the process of an issue receiving consideration from policymakers, are also examined.

The work concerning influence in local land-use decisions highlights a variety of competing ideas involving antigrowth movements, the effectiveness of growth control measures, the processes used to create local policy agendas and find issue resolution, and, more broadly, the power struggle between competing interest groups. Several researchers highlight the need for more work in this area. According to Gutterbock (1980), by looking at the ways local governments make land use decisions in different situations, institutional frameworks for controlling these types of issues can be better understood. In addition, antigrowth movements are an important research target to help balance the prevalence of theories that focus on pro-growth issues (Clark and Goetz, 1994) and provide a better understanding of the causes of these kinds of movements and why some

are successful and some are not (Schneider and Teske, 1993). According to Garkovich (1982):

Land use planning is a bifurcated process and each stage engages a set of values and interests which are inherently contradictory. A recognition of this may explain why the debate of land use planning will continue to be a major public issue. (p. 64)

According to Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976), many studies involving participation in policy formation focus only on the end result of the groups' efforts to influence policymakers' decisions. By using an agenda-building perspective, the part of the process when choices for decision makers are being defined, which researchers often overlook, can be examined. The authors explain that more work looking closer at this pre-decisional stage in a wide variety of settings, involving different geographical, cultural, and societal areas, for example, is needed. Studies focused on political symbolism can expand ideas about how citizens mobilize and political commodities are distributed, as well as the intricacies of group conflict and cohesion (Cobb and Elder, 1973). This research takes a close look at a land-use policy conflict that divided a small town and illuminated a bigger ongoing community controversy involving how residents envision their town's future. Because town council has taken action regarding this issue, post-decision impacts are also evaluated to attempt to determine what effects, if any, earlier efforts had on the decision and other actions that followed.

While some work focuses on the potential contributions ordinary citizens can make to the political process, the agenda-building theory provides a way to uncover how the general public is motivated to participate in the shaping of policy issues and why their

role in this process is so important. While the ultimate goal of the agenda-building theory is to determine how certain issues find their way to a government agenda (Cobb & Elder, 1983), this research will employ the framework within a case study analysis to explore how citizens relate and respond to symbols and messages provided by various groups involved in a local political conflict and the ways specific aspects of this communication can affect citizens' responses.

Method of Analysis

To uncover the ways groups on both sides of a local land use conflict attempted to define and redefine the issue to gain the support of local citizens, a case study is conducted featuring a discourse analysis method involving the messages from those groups involved in the political conflict. In an effort to provide a complete and in-depth analysis, this work examines group messages generated between the time when the initial rezoning for the project was first considered by the Blacksburg Planning Commission in 2006 (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, February 7) and when Ordinance 1450, a measure requiring any retail development over 80,000 square feet to get special approval from the town, was approved by town council (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Discourse Analysis

This method is used to examine the messages presented by groups involved in the conflict in an effort to determine the ways each group created various definitions for the issue over the course of the conflict, how these definitions were communicated to Blacksburg residents, as well as the ultimate goal of each group. Discourse was examined

from the following groups: The Blacksburg Partnership (see Appendix B), Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth (see Appendix C), Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 (see Appendix D), Citizens First (see Appendix E), the developers for the retail development (see Appendix F), and Blacksburg residents and government officials (see Appendix G). In addition, all news articles, editorials, and letters to the editor appearing in the *Roanoke Times*, the town's primary local newspaper, during the identified time period were reviewed (Appendix H).

Town Council and Planning Commission meetings. The Town of Blacksburg broadcasts each town council meeting via the town's public access channel and maintains a video archive of the meetings. Video footage and minutes of the meetings were reviewed, focusing specifically on public comments. Even though formal public hearings are not held at every council meeting, the council does allow time for public address where residents can speak about any issues of concern. All of the meetings within the identified time frame were reviewed to identify any references involving the retail development.

Online discourse. News releases, articles, newsletters, and individual postings were reviewed from group websites and online forums. While Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 and the developer for the project did have active websites during the controversy, they have since been taken down. Content from the Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 website was found using an online archiving service, but content from the developer's website was unable to be recovered.

Newspaper coverage. News articles, editorials, and letters to the editor referencing the conflict published by *The Roanoke Times*, which provided the most

consistent and complete coverage of the controversy, were accessed from LexisNexis Academic, and advertisements appearing in the paper that were paid for by the groups involved in the conflict were reviewed. Specific messages advanced by the groups are identified and newspaper coverage of the issue is also explored.

Examining these various kinds of discourse have allowed for the exploration of the different types of messages used by the groups involved in the conflict. According to Edelman (1964), by looking at consistency in the ways groups use symbols, common political meanings can be found. The overall goal of the discourse analysis is to identify how the groups involved and affected by the South Main Street development conflict characterized the issue and determine if and how this characterization contributed to expansion of the issue.

Cobb and Elder's (1983) agenda-building framework, which has been identified as a model for analyzing interest group competition and influence (Davis, 1995), is used to evaluate the messages for the South Main Street project controversy. Specifically, the collection of discourse is examined using the characteristics identified within the agenda-building framework as affecting issue expansion (Cobb & Elder, 1983). The analysis involves identifying the various ways each group describes the issue throughout the course of the conflict in an effort to trace the issue's path to expansion between February 2006, when the project was green-lighted by the town, and when Ordinance 1450 was approved in May 2007. This will involve examining both explicit statements, such as those directly identifying the location of a large-scale retailer near an elementary school as a safety issue, as well as implicit definitions, which could include stressing the importance of the closeness of a community. Messages designed to broaden the scope of

an issue, which could include defining the effects of a commercial development as being intimately linked to responsible planning for the future of the town, for example, are examined, as well as those created to demonstrate immediate and direct impacts, such as increased traffic in quiet residential neighborhoods. Statements illuminating the long-term consequences are also explored. Messages detailing how keeping a large retailer out of a community could damage the town's economy, resulting in future tax increases to support a town budget with no new revenue, exemplify how temporal relevance can be established. Emotional messages can create strong responses, motivating people to join a group's cause, and can include passionate pleas for an organization or government officials to rectify a major misstep. Containment strategies are also identified as part of the analysis and can involve the strategic use of messages to keep an issue from advancing towards expansion. Postponement of an issue, such as the declaration that a piece of legislation is being rushed through the governmental approval process without proper consideration, is one way groups can attempt to stop or delay an issue. Finally, media coverage related to the local land use controversy is examined. Like emotional messages, the media can help to quickly expand an issue to a large audience. By presenting an issue as a bitter clash between groups representing two very different perspectives, the coverage could attract the attention of a more general public and add to the intensity of the issue.

For the discourse analysis presented in relation to each of the issue expansion characteristics, the effectiveness of the messages are also evaluated by looking at the public hearing addresses delivered to council immediately preceding the vote on Ordinance 1450. With the groups' goal of influencing Blacksburg residents to become

actively involved with the issue by voicing their views at council meetings, these public hearing messages are compared to the interest group messages to examine similarities and differences. The results of this work are presented in the following chapter.

III. ISSUE EXPANSION AND ORDINANCE 1450

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the various messages used by groups involved in the South Main Street project controversy to expand the issue in an effort to convince Blacksburg residents to join their cause. The ways these messages were crafted and presented are also examined. More specifically, by looking at the messages from the time the development was approved by the town until Ordinance 1450 was passed, the way groups representing both sides of the issue defined and sometimes reinterpreted the issue, pushing it towards the main goal of attaining issue expansion, is investigated.

First, a very general view of the overall course groups involved in the South Main Street development conflict used to achieve successful issue expansion is presented along with a look at the issue's evolution through the issue life cycle and an assessment of the groups' ultimate goals regarding issue involvement and the residents of Blacksburg. The specific messages of each group are then presented for the following relevant categories of characteristics related to issue expansion: issue specificity, issue significance, temporal relevance, emotional symbols, issue containment, and media coverage. In addition, the messages for each issue characteristic are evaluated based on the main target identified by all of the groups involved in the conflict—residents' responses at the public hearing held immediately before town council's vote on Ordinance 1450.

The Path to Issue Expansion (Timeframe)

According to Cobb and Elder (1983), issues must be expanded to successfully influence policy initiatives. By defining and redefining an issue over time, groups can broaden the issue's appeal and extend support from a small group of core members to

larger and more general and diverse publics. A path to issue expansion can be traced for both sides of the South Main Street development issue. When the project was first proposed to Blacksburg Town Council, it received substantial support from residents speaking at the planning commission and town council meetings, where it was being considered (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). While there were some concerns expressed about the project during this early approval phase, they were limited to a small number of specific impacts about the project. The main concerns were about increases in traffic and insufficient details about the project in the site plan submission (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, April 4; 2006, May 9). Although a majority of Blacksburg Town Council members voted in favor of the rezoning that would pave the way for the South Main Street development, some expressed apprehension about the project before a large-scale retail development was even discussed (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). Two members, Dan Langrehr and Ron Rordam, voted against the initial rezoning, citing concerns regarding increased traffic resulting from the development, as well as the potential impacts to nearby residential areas, the elementary school located on the border of the new development, and downtown businesses. Langrehr stated that although he supported the general concept of the project, he found the development plans very ambiguous and cautioned that council needed more time to provide sufficient direction. Roger Hedgepeth, who was mayor during the initial rezoning request, urged council members to approve the project, which would provide the community with the income it needed to sustain its quality of life. Hedgepeth told the council, “You’re either ready for the future or its going to pass you by” (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). This corresponds with the first stage of Hainsworth’s (1990) issue life cycle, which is marked

by residents and council members showing interest in the issue and identifying a need that must be addressed.

A year after the developers received approval for the project and claimed there were no plans for large scale retail to be part of the development (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9), new site plans that featured the footprint for a large retail building were submitted to the town and developers began answering questions about the possible inclusion of a big box retailer very ambiguously, stating that they had consulted with many different types of retailers, but could not say anything definite about the project (Moxley, 2007, April 10). After revised site plans were submitted for the development in March 2007, Langrehr, who had been critical of the project since its inception, introduced Ordinance 1450, claiming that it would give the town another planning tool to handle growth (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, March 27). He recommended sending it to the Blacksburg Planning Commission for immediate review. While Langrehr told council that the town needed to take action quickly on the measure, other members were hesitant, saying that they needed time for review the ordinance before sending it to the planning commission. Council voted to send the measure to the commission for review, despite two dissenting votes from council members Paul Lancaster and Tom Sherman, who stated they wanted a more complete study of both the positive and negative effects a measure limiting the size of retail development in the town could bring. Ron Rordam, who was elected the new mayor of the town following Hedgepeth's retirement in May 2006, also voiced concern about fast-tracking the measure, even though he voted in favor of sending it to the commission for review (Moxley, 2007, March 29). In email discussions with BURG members, council members seemed opposed to allowing large

format retail development in the town, but they were unsure as to whether Ordinance 1450 was the most effective way to manage the issue (Brenneman, 2007, April 12). Council member Tom Sherman said that the ordinance could be viewed as a major obstacle for businesses looking to bring retail development to the town. He explained that the town's consideration of Ordinance 1450, "...was a very complex situation complicated further by threats of law suits and damage claims" (Brenneman, 2007, April 12). While he identified the South Main Street project as being consistent with the kind of development advocated in the town's comprehensive plan, he stated, "I don't believe anyone wants a Walmart in town...no one ever mentioned Walmart and I think anyone with even a minimum awareness would recognize that Walmart would be a flash point for opposition" (Brenneman, 2007, April 12).

Before Ordinance 1450 was proposed, those communicating messages of support for the development consisted of the developers, the Blacksburg Partnership, and 27 residents who spoke at the town council meeting for rezoning approval (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). Around the time the measure was introduced, the group Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth (BURG) formed and not long after, Citizens First, an established political advocacy group in the town, publicly announced its support for Ordinance 1450 (Hudson, 2007, May 7). As groups emerged and began taking sides and the issue was pushed into the public policy arena by the introduction of Ordinance 1450, the issue officially entered the mediation and amplification stage identified by Hainsworth (1990). As the vote for the measure neared, proponents of the project gathered to form Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 (Moxley, 2007, May 29b). The goals of the groups on both sides of the issue, including the developers, are evident and

common. Each of these groups wanted Blacksburg residents to join their efforts to pressure town council on the issue of Ordinance 1450 (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 27; Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, 2007, May 27; Llamas LLC, 2007, May 2). Through newspaper advertisements, petition drives, and websites, the groups asked residents to express their feelings about the measure by emailing or writing letters to the council and addressing the issue at planning commission and council meetings. To convince residents to actually become involved, the groups had to define the issue to appeal to as many residents as possible. These groups used several of the issue expansion characteristics identified by Cobb and Elder (1983) to achieve this goal.

Issue Specificity

By defining an issue ambiguously and in general and overreaching terms and ideas, as opposed to very narrowly and specifically, groups are able to present an issue in a way that allows more people with divergent interests to relate to some aspect of the issue (Cobb & Elder, 1983). If a connection with an issue can be established, people are more likely to support the issue, or even make an effort to get involved. When Ordinance 1450 was proposed and sides of the issue were established, discussion began to shift from specific details and impacts of the project to more broadly defined ideas, which signified the issue's entrance into the third stage of the issue life cycle. According to Hainsworth (1990), this organization stage occurs when the conflict reaches its height and groups begin focusing more on the issue's resolution. Messages from those supporting the retail development evolved from descriptions of a pedestrian-friendly, community-inspired

project (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9) to a first-class shopping destination that would bring national retailers to a deserted part of town (Hudson, 2007, April 12).

Those groups criticizing the development also redefined their messages as the issue evolved. While early claims included concerns about specific impacts of the development (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9), this changed when mentions of a Walmart store began to surface. When it was first formed, BURG, which was by far the most vocal critic of the developer's plans to include a big box retailer, concentrated its messages on the negative impacts of a Walmart store becoming part of the community (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 10). This was soon refocused to highlight the consequences of big box development in general (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 22). As the issue progressed and groups on both sides determined their need for broader public support, and controversy surrounding Ordinance 1450 escalated, the groups involved began to broaden their issue definitions even further. The issue became about much more than just the proposed development. The issue ultimately was recast by both sides as directly affecting the future of the town.

Expansion began when the issue shifted from being a conflict about the development to a conflict about Ordinance 1450, with various groups taking their places on opposite sides of the issue. Those opposing the measure, which included the developers, the Blacksburg Partnership, and Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, expanded the issue to one of responsible action for the future of the Town of Blacksburg. Not long after Blacksburg Town Council member Don Langrehr proposed Ordinance 1450, Jeanne Stosser and Georgia Anne Snyder-Falkinham, residents serving as the local developers of the project, immediately responded with a lengthy statement outlining the advantages of

the project, as well as the implications of passing the ordinance (Hudson, 2007, April 12). It was this letter that marked the beginning of issue expansion for Ordinance 1450 opposition. It explained that, if passed, the ordinance would drastically change the economic future of the town. The developers and other groups opposing the approval of the measure reinforced this message, describing the ordinance as an attempt to stop growth in Blacksburg (Llamas LLC, 2007, April 29) and as “a bad proposal that will create negative consequences for all Blacksburg residents” (Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, Reasons to oppose). An online petition created to demonstrate opposition to the ordinance was titled “Responsible Economic Development of Blacksburg,” encouraging citizens to show their support for responsible growth for the town (Llamas LLC, Responsible economic development). This broad classification of the impacts of Ordinance 1450 gained intensity and continued until town council’s vote on the measure. Two days before the vote, Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 placed an advertisement in the *Roanoke Times*, which, under the heading “You Can Make A Difference!” warned of dramatic changes to the town’s economy if the measure was passed (Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, 2007, May 27).

Those supporting Ordinance 1450, mainly BURG and Citizens First, also began to expand the issue immediately after the measure was introduced. Like those opposing the ordinance, these supporters advanced the measure as one that would have a profound impact on the future of Blacksburg. They described Ordinance 1450 as an essential tool to help protect the town’s and the residents’ futures (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 7), allowing the local government “...to grow the Blacksburg that we want” (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, April 29). The supporters

linked the ordinance with smart development and growth, which refers to a range of development principles created to use existing infrastructure to preserve undeveloped land, encourage alternative transportation options, and integrate residential and other land uses (Housing Virginia, Glossary of housing). They identified Ordinance 1450 as a way to not only advocate smart growth for the town's future, but also to include residents in this very important process (Hudson, 2007, May 7). BURG and Citizens First joined together to sponsor an advertisement featured on the screen of a local movie theatre stating, "The Road to Smart Development is not a By-Pass Around Citizens" (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, April 22), which signaled the emergence of concerns involving the political power structure in the town.

BURG made extensive efforts to show the residents of Blacksburg that this was an issue that demanded community-wide involvement. BURG members regularly filled the council chamber seats and took to the podium to express their support for Ordinance 1450 at Blacksburg Planning Commission and Town Council Meetings, which are broadcast on the town's community access television station (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, April 3; 2007, May 2; 2007, May 8; 2007, May 22; 2007, May 29). Even if the ordinance was not on the agenda for discussion, members voiced their support for the measure during the public comment session of the meetings, where residents are allowed three minutes to address any issues of concern. Many of the members wore green BURG t-shirts to the meetings, which were sold as part of a group fundraiser, as a show of support. According to the group, if all BURG supporters attended the meetings dressed in green shirts, "The visual statement will leave no doubt as to where the passion is" (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 26).

While groups on both sides of the Ordinance 1450 issue were vying for community support to help influence Blacksburg Town Council's decision on the measure, the winner of the battle was clear. Speakers voiced overwhelming support for Ordinance 1450 at meetings where the ordinance was not even on the agenda for discussion (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, April 3; 2007, May 2; 2007, May 8; 2007, May 22), and the Town of Blacksburg drew its biggest crowd during the duration of the conflict when the town council and planning commission held a joint meeting for the official vote on the measure. One hundred and three town residents filled the council chambers to address the issue (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). During this meeting, BURG member Margaret Breslau presented the council and planning commission with paper copies of petitions collected by group members, which she stated included more than 3,500 signatures in support of Ordinance 1450. In contrast, an online petition sponsored by the developers of the project garnered only 595 electronic signatures (Llamas LLC, Responsible economic development). Since groups representing both sides of the debate had the clear goal of getting Blacksburg residents actively involved in the issue, the number of petition signatures, as well as the messages presented by residents at the public hearing that occurred immediately before the vote on Ordinance 1450, serve as an indication of how the majority of residents that chose to become actively involved in the issue felt about the ordinance. Of the 103 citizens that addressed the council and planning commission during the joint session public hearing, only 18 residents voiced opposition regarding the measure (Town of Blacksburg 2007, May 29). Although groups on both sides of the Ordinance 1450 debate ultimately defined the issue as one of critical importance to the town's future by establishing a broad definition to gather as much

support as possible, there are other characteristics that can be used to help expand an issue (Cobb & Elder, 1983). Groups supporting and opposing Ordinance 1450 focused on several of these issue characteristics in an effort to advance their side of the issue.

Issue Significance

Significance is another characteristic that can be used to expand an issue (Cobb & Elder, 1983). If a public can be convinced that an issue will strongly impact a significant portion of a community, issue significance has been demonstrated. Groups both supporting and opposing Ordinance 1450 worked diligently to attach significance to the issue not long after the measure was proposed. The lack of retail choices in the Town of Blacksburg has been a long-running debate in the community, established well before the conflict over Ordinance 1450 began. A 2001 study estimated that the Town of Blacksburg was losing almost \$3 million in consumer retail spending a week to nearby areas (Manese-Lee, 2006, May 22). When first proposed, the South Main Street development received strong community support, and those with concerns about the project generally agreed that they wanted to see a retail development in that particular part of town (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9). Groups on both sides of the Ordinance 1450 debate seemed to be well aware of this, as it was reflected in their communication strategy. Efforts to demonstrate the issue's significant and immediate impacts on the community resonated with Blacksburg residents, especially those in support of Ordinance 1450. A significant number of speakers at the public hearing portion of the meeting for the ordinance vote repeated many of the points mentioned by the groups throughout the

conflict involving the immediate and direct impacts of Ordinance 1450 (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Groups opposing Ordinance 1450 established issue significance by linking the passage of the measure with the weakening of the town's ability to attract retailers. In a column published in the *Roanoke Times*, Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 Honorary Chair and former Blacksburg Mayor Roger Hedgepeth discussed concerns that there are no places in Blacksburg to purchase certain basic items, due to the lack of available retail choices (Hedgepeth, 2007, May 27). He explained, "Blacksburg is a place where any growth is viewed suspiciously. Changing that image is long overdue" (Hedgepeth, 2007, May 27). He defended the addition of a large-scale retailer to the project, explaining that it would attract the number of shoppers needed to sustain the entire development. The local developers for the project sponsored two full-page advertisements in the *Roanoke Times* about a month before the final vote on Ordinance 1450 was held, touting the kinds of stores the South Main Street project could bring to the town. The first advertisement featured images of a development with upscale retailers like Ann Taylor Loft with the heading, "Blacksburg has finally attracted National Retailers and Restaurants" (Llamas, 2007, April 29). The second advertisement ran four days after the first and featured the same images, only smaller, and described a development that would provide retail shops, a state-of-the-art gym, restaurants, a brewery, and a movie theater, followed by the words, "Imagine the Possibilities!" (Llamas, 2007, May 2). According to the developers, "If Blacksburg wants this retail center, the center will have to include a major tenant to be viable" (Hudson, 2007, April 12). To bring these national retailers to the town, they claimed, a large retail store must be included. Ordinance 1450 opposition implied that if

the measure was passed, the entire development project would be scrapped and future retail projects would be in jeopardy, which could lead to limitations of shopping choices in the town and forced residents to travel to neighboring areas for retail purchases (Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, Reasons to oppose).

While only 18 speakers at the meeting voiced opposition to Ordinance 1450, a majority of these speakers mentioned the need for retail growth in Blacksburg (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). According to one resident, “Blacksburg needs good, quality development” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Others pointed to the decline in certain areas of the town, especially where the proposed large-scale commercial retailer would be located. They urged council not to limit the kinds of retail available in the town and vote to transform Blacksburg into a shopping destination. “Growth is here,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) explained one speaker, “we just need to manage it responsibly”. Ordinance 1450, according to the speakers, was not the proper way to manage growth. They claimed the town must be open to new and diverse growth to prosper. “This is a leadership vote, and now is when we really need our leaders,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) said one speaker.

Another point emphasized in relation to the immediate economic impacts of the measure was the need for shopping choices in Blacksburg (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Several argued that the limited number of stores in Blacksburg forced them to travel out of town to purchase many household items, adding that more retail choices in town would keep money in Blacksburg and benefit existing businesses. Some of these same speakers claimed that the existing stores in Blacksburg were too specialized to offer many everyday items and catered to very small audiences. Another speaker questioned

what would happen to the first phase of the South Main Street project that saw strong support from residents. “What if the whole development goes away?” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) she asked.

Taking into account that even those who voiced concerns about the South Main Street development when it was first proposed supported the general concept of the project (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9), groups supporting Ordinance 1450 continually reaffirmed their support of the development initially proposed to council before it included a big box store (Town of Blacksburg 2007, April 10). The groups attempted to establish issue significance with residents by reinforcing their support for the original project, highlighting the negative consequences of a big box retailer and explaining how Ordinance 1450 could help the town protect itself from such consequences. Citizens First sponsored an advertisement in the *Roanoke Times* titled, “Citizens First Supports South Main Street Development,” (Citizens First, 2007, May 8) where they explained:

We have an excellent system of roads that takes us to big box stores in ten minutes. We don't have the need, or the road system, to handle a similar store in town. The smaller shops and restaurants originally proposed will make an important contribution to the revitalization of business in Blacksburg. (Citizens First, 2007 May 8)

A BURG advertisement titled “Blacksburg Needs Ordinance 1450,” which was also featured in the newspaper, described the project as one completely different from the development approved by town council (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 27). Providing a list of prominent points to convince residents that passing the

ordinance and, ultimately, allowing a big box store to be constructed in the town would result in many undesirable outcomes, the advertisement claimed that Blacksburg should, "...join dozens of other places all over the country and protect our neighborhoods, our schools, our quality of life, and our town's distinctive character from big-box development" (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 27).

The direct and immediate negative impacts resulting from the construction of a large retail store, specifically increases in traffic, safety issues involving nearby neighborhoods and an elementary school, and damage to local businesses and the town's character, were most often cited from Ordinance 1450 supporters as having the most devastating affect on the community. When BURG first formed, it aggressively advanced messages concerning the effects that can result from Walmart stores being constructed in communities. The first *Roanoke Times* advertisement sponsored by BURG, which was titled "What will a 179,000 sq. ft. big box store on S. Main Street bring?" (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, April 29) borrowed from a staple that had been used in Walmart's "Rolling Back Prices" advertising campaign since 1996 – a yellow smiley-face (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006, May 8; Hudson, K. & Zimmerman A, 2006, April 18). BURG's advertisement featured a yellow face similar to the one used by Walmart, but with a frown instead of a smile (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, April 29). The advertisement highlighted traffic congestion and sprawl, negative community and environmental impacts, and the close proximity to the elementary school as concerns. These points were consistently reinforced by BURG from the time Ordinance 1450 was proposed until it was voted on by the town council, but BURG's focus shifted from the consequences of a Walmart store to messages regarding

the impacts of large-scale development in general and the benefits of Ordinance 1450. In an interview with the *Roanoke Times* BURG steering committee chair Daniel Breslau claimed that the biggest threats big box retail posed to the town was being out of scale with the community, hurting local businesses, and causing traffic problems in residential areas and safety concerns for students attending the nearby elementary school (Moxley, 2007, May 29a). BURG posted a document for members on its online forum, which was referred to as “big box talking points,” approximately one week before the town council and planning commission voted on Ordinance 1450 (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 22). Officially titled “Big Box Retail – What are the effects on communities?” quality of life, such as higher crime rates associated with big box stores and parking lots, increases in traffic volume, and the effects a big box store would have on the neighboring elementary school, were highlighted.

Messages of support for Ordinance 1450 dominated the public hearing and the direct and immediate consequences of not passing the initiative, which was the subject of many of BURG’s communication efforts, were the most widely cited topic (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). This certainly exemplifies the successful efforts of Ordinance 1450 supporters in establishing issue significance. More specifically, safety was the most prevalent reason speakers used to persuade council members to vote in favor of the ordinance. The proximity of the retail site to Margaret Beeks Elementary School was the biggest safety concern for residents. Supporters of the ordinance highlighted the potential dangers a large retail store located next door to the school could bring. Many spoke of the large number of elementary school students that walk and ride bikes to the school, explaining the increased traffic the store would bring to the area

would pose a safety risk to those students. Others discussed the impact fumes from cars and delivery trucks would have on students and the location of the school's playground, which is in close proximity to proposed building's parking lot. As one ordinance supporter explained of the consequences of building a large commercial building next to the school, "It will be nothing like the peaceful playground and school I know" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Another safety issue repeatedly identified by supporters involved the increase in traffic and the impact of nearby neighborhoods. Speakers mentioned the noise and pollution that would result from the spike in traffic, also noting that project developers had not completed an adequate traffic study of the area to better understand the impact of the increased traffic flow. Several speakers urged council to protect the integrity of the nearby neighborhoods. "Walmart belongs in strip malls, not residential neighborhoods," (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) one resident said. In addition to questions of safety, the potential damage to the character of Blacksburg was frequently mentioned by Ordinance 1450 supporters. Describing the town's spirit, unique character, small-town feel, integrity, and beauty, citizens urged council not to put those qualities at risk by voting against the ordinance. One stated, "It's about quality of life, and that is why we are living in this town" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Other concerns addressed at the hearing involving the impacts of a large-scale retailer would have on the community, including damage to local businesses and the revenue from big box stores not staying in communities (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). As one speaker explained, "It will mean the destruction of many small businesses and the destruction of neighborhoods" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Some

questioned the need for a big box store in the area, pointing to several large retailers already located in a nearby town. Most of the residents addressing the council referred to the impacts of Walmart, specifically. Speakers voiced concern over increases in crime associated with Walmart stores, as well as the retailer's exploitation of its workers, and the fact that it sells guns, ammunition and alcohol. "I'm completely against Walmart, I'm not against growth," (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) one speaker declared. Another told council, "We don't need such a poor citizen in our town" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Temporal Relevance

While the groups supporting Ordinance 1450 focused much of their efforts on establishing the immediate impacts of not passing the measure, which they believed would pave the way for big box store construction, those on the opposing side touted the long-term impacts that would occur if the ordinance was approved. Temporal relevance is another characteristic that can affect issue expansion (Cobb & Elder, 1983).

Demonstrating that an issue will have consequences well beyond the point of its resolution can impact the way the public views the issue.

Ordinance 1450 opposition worked to create temporal relevance by communicating the long-term economic impacts that would result if council approved the measure. Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 claimed the ordinance would damage the town's economy, leading to an increase in property taxes, and discourage economic development by sending a message to potential businesses that they are not welcome in the community (Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, Reasons to oppose). The group also

said the ordinance would encourage sprawl, forcing businesses to locate outside of the town in undeveloped green spaces instead of in existing underutilized areas within the town's limits. The Blacksburg Partnership stated that the passage of Ordinance 1450 would diminish economic growth in the town (Blacksburg Partnership, 2007, May 27), and Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 Chair and former Mayor Roger Hedgepeth argued that without generating the new kind of revenue that a commercial development like the South Main Street project could offer, the town could not be financially self-sustaining in the future and would be forced to increase taxes (Hedgepeth, 2007, May 27). According to the developers, the ordinance would prevent any retailers from considering Blacksburg as a potential location in the future by making it difficult for developers to work with the town, which could result in the town losing considerable future income. They also stated, "If Blacksburg decides to challenge the project's vested rights, costly litigation will ensue..." (Hudson, 2007, April 12). In addition to long-term economic impacts, Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 said that, if approved, the measure would threaten the town's future planning process, adding layers of government on top of effective procedures that have already been established (Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, Reasons to oppose).

Many of the residents speaking in opposition to the measure connected with these long-term consequences highlighted by the groups. Some voicing their disapproval for Ordinance 1450 agreed that the ordinance would impede business development in the town (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). They explained that Ordinance 1450 would require developers to design several full sets of site plans, which could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, for a project that may or may not get approved because of the special use permit requirement. One speaker wondered why a developer would want to

invest so much money in a project only to have those efforts rejected by the town.

Another suggested to council ways other than a special land-use ordinance to regulate developments such as the one in question, including the creation of planned commercial districts. Most of these speakers warned that the passage of Ordinance 1450 would create hesitance about bringing new development projects to Blacksburg. An increase in property taxes was another economic consequence mentioned. One resident warned council that if Ordinance 1450 was passed, the town would be severely limited in the ways they could expand the town's tax base.

While supporters of Ordinance 1450 worked to broadly define the issue as one that would have a significant impact on the future of Blacksburg, they emphasized specific long-term impacts far less than their opposition, choosing instead to focus more on detailing immediate consequences of not passing the measure. In a list of talking points provided to group members, however, BURG did claim that the measure would not prohibit development, but it would simply require a special use permit for stores over 80,000 square feet (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 22). A letter to the editor published in the *Roanoke Times* said that the measure was not an anti-development initiative as it was being defined by those opposing the measure, but, rather, very development friendly and would help attract smaller businesses in the town (Sprague, 2007, May 6).

Even though the groups opposing Ordinance 1450 invested a great deal of effort to advance their views concerning the long-term effects of the measure and many of those voicing their opposition at the public hearing relayed the groups' points, this community support just could not compare to the large number of residents backing the measure at

the hearing. Ordinance 1450 supporters also addressed the town's duty to pass the measure, describing it as an important development tool for council to help promote responsible growth consistent with the town's comprehensive plan (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Speakers detailed the town's need for control over retail growth, calling a big box store an environmental and planning disaster. Many of the supporters of the ordinance recognized that commercial-type development was needed in the community, especially in the area of the proposed retail site, but they cautioned that not all development is good development. One speaker said that development "needs to be done in the spirit of Blacksburg. It needs to be a Blacksburg brand of growth" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Many participants pointed to Ordinance 1450 as giving the town more time to cautiously evaluate the town's growth and development. Several speakers emphasized that the ordinance would not prohibit development or prevent progress, pointing out that big retail projects could still become a reality in Blacksburg if the ordinance was approved. The ordinance would provide opportunities for more control over these types of projects and for more citizen input. Others also highlighted the importance of citizen participation in the town's planning and development processes, urging the council to consider the voices of the citizens and allow their constituents to play a role in the future of Blacksburg. According to one resident, "1450 ensures public discussion happens before it's too late" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Some Ordinance 1450 supporters discussed the town's duty to practice responsible government (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Highlighting the need for ethics, morals, transparency and openness in government, they pointed to the ordinance as a foundation to support these qualities. Others urged the council to protect the integrity

of the planning process, use reasonable standards, and give major town decisions, such as the establishment of a large commercial development, adequate time for thorough evaluation. “We should take this seriously and do the right thing,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) one speaker proclaimed.

Emotional Symbols

As Cobb and Elder (1983) explain, a simple and effective way to convince audiences to become involved with an issue is through the use of emotional appeals. These kinds of messages, whether negative or positive, can lead to quick and powerful responses from diverse publics. While the developers and others opposing Ordinance 1450 did not use this issue expansion technique, BURG relied heavily on it to help build support for the measure. The petition they created, which was the first documented communication for the group, described a dire situation for the town, declaring, “Walmart is Coming! Save Our Town: Support Ordinance 1450” (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 10). Through their online communication, including electronic newsletters and action alerts, the group encouraged its members to speak at planning commission and council meetings, which would allow them to reach not only local government officials with their messages, but town residents through local television broadcasts of meetings. The group capitalized on this opportunity to directly address residents who were watching the meeting broadcasts, providing topic suggestions for members and urging them to speak at meetings (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 7; 2007, May 21; 2007, May 26). Topic suggestions provided on the BURG website included, “your heartfelt reactions to the Walmart Supercenter where we

had been told there would be a pedestrian friendly, manageable, mixed-use development” (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 7). A BURG action alert issued three days before the ordinance vote asked members to provide a personal testimonial during the public comment session, which could include discussing what brought them to the town and made them want to stay (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 26). The alert stressed the importance of providing genuine reactions to the South Main Street development process, asking BURG members to detail their feelings about the development process conflict and how it has convinced them that Ordinance 1450 is needed. They strongly emphasized the need for first-time speakers to address council and planning commission members, and group members were asked to bring friends with them to the meetings and encouraged them to speak (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 7) and prompted members who have not spoken before to do so (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 21). An action alert issues just days before the final vote on Ordinance 1450 urged first-time speakers “to get up your nerve. The stakes are too high to remain silent...think of the satisfaction knowing that you did your part in making Blacksburg history” (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 26).

BURG was not only the group supporting Ordinance 1450 to use emotional appeals to get the attention of residents. A group called Concerned Parents of Margaret Beeks Students held a protest outside of the government building where the public hearing and vote on the ordinance was to take place (Hudlicka, 2007, May 29). A group of elementary school students created a very stirring scene, lining up in protest and

carrying signs with messages about the dangers of a big box store being located near their elementary school (Moxley, 2007, May 30).

Many of the Ordinance 1450 supporters attending the public hearing spoke passionately about their love for Blacksburg and their distaste for the way the South Main Street project was managed by the developers (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). They recounted stories of how they passed up job opportunities in other places, choosing to come to Blacksburg to live because of its small-town character and true sense of community. “If you make it look like every other town,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) one speaker warned, “people will pass it by.” One woman told council of how friendly and tight-knit the town was and described how proud she feels to know her mailman by name. Another said, “I truly love this town. I call this place home and it is where my heart is” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Speakers also responded strongly to change in the site plan to include a big box retailer. The most commonly used term to describe this change was “bait and switch,” while others used words such as deceit, greed, lies, deception, manipulation, and smoke and mirrors. “The citizens, and perhaps the council, feel duped,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) said one speaker, while many added that the town deserves a method or recourse since the developers changed the terms of the agreement. “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) said one speaker, urging the council not to get misled by the developers a second time.

Despite the fact that the groups working to create opposition to the ordinance did not use emotional appeals to gather support, one of the most poignant moments of the public hearing came from a woman who described the stores in Blacksburg as too

expensive (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Having no car, she said, required her to use public transportation to get to a Wal-Mart in a nearby town to buy items within her budget. While the store is only a few miles away, she explained, her public transportation travel time totaled over an hour. “I would love to be able to walk and get groceries,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) she said. This was a very moving plea to convince council to vote against Ordinance 1450, but this single moment could not match the dozens of supporters who lined up at the podium to deliver their emotion-laden messages of support for Ordinance 1450.

Issue Containment

While groups can attempt to keep an issue from expanding by countering the aforementioned issue expansion characteristics, Cobb and Elder (1983) outline several specific strategies for issue containment. These include group-oriented strategies, which involve targeting an opposing group to lessen its appeal, and issue-oriented strategies that focus more on the ways an opposing side has characterized the issue. Groups representing both sides of the Ordinance 1450 conflict used issue containment strategies, but those opposing the measure were much more aggressive with their approach.

These opposition groups used an issue-oriented containment strategy to convince residents that Ordinance 1450 was a measure not in accordance with the town’s comprehensive plans and was rushed through the approval process (Hudson, 2007, April 12). They also identified this ordinance fast tracking as being a disservice to residents. In an advertisement in the *Roanoke Times*, the Blacksburg Partnership stated that town

council should represent the concerns of all Blacksburg residents by providing sufficient time to thoroughly consider the measure and ensure all interested citizens have the opportunity to provide input. It warned of “The effects of hastily adopting an ordinance restricting commercial and retail developments without clearly defined criteria...”

(Blacksburg Partnership, 2007, May 27).

Claiming that the council needed to take more time to gather information about the ordinance is an example of postponement, a specific issue-containment strategy identified by Cobb and Elder (1983). According to the authors, groups justify the postponement of an issue by pointing to a need for more information or involvement. Those opposing the ordinance also used group-oriented issue containment tactics to discredit BURG and other Ordinance 1450 supporters. The local developers for the South Main Street project characterized the groups supporting the initiative as “...a small group of vocal citizens – who have as their primary goal to stop any development in Blacksburg...” (Hudson, 2007, April 12). Members of the group Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 told the *Roanoke Times* that it formed in response to a group of activists that provided opposition to every kind of development project that was presented to the town, as well as their fear that, “the council’s knee-jerk responses to anti-development forces will damage the town’s economy and its future” (Moxley, 2007, May 29b). The online petition created to support the efforts of those fighting against the ordinance even stated, “Remember, if you don’t act, the opponents will act for you” (Llamas LLC, Responsible economic development).

Some of the public hearing participants opposing the measure expressed concern over what they perceived to be a rush to pass the ordinance by the council (Town of

Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Calling it fast-tracked and expedited, these speakers claimed the ordinance could not have been evaluated properly in the short amount of time since it had been proposed. They warned the council to think carefully and to take more time to study and review the ordinance, providing a more orderly approach for such a major decision. “Make sure we get it right the first time,” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) said one resident. Another speaker urged council members to look to the future and consider the unintended consequences that would arise from the ordinance’s approval.

Although they focused much less energy on these kinds of issue containment strategies, BURG did make an effort to discredit their opponents by portraying them as rich and powerful with no genuine ties to the community. After Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 hired a marketing company to call Blacksburg residents and persuade them to oppose the ordinance (Moxley, 2007, May 29b), BURG immediately responded, calling it an “astroturf” campaign designed to hurt the town and damage the local democratic process (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, May 26). According to the group, “As opposed to a real grassroots group, like BURG, which is ‘money-poor and people-rich,’ this group is clearly ‘people-poor and cash-rich.’ Its goals are to give the appearance of a real grassroots movement” (BURG action alert, May 26, 2007).

Media Coverage and Online Communication

Media coverage can serve as a catalyst for issue expansion, helping groups communicate their messages to larger audiences (Cobb & Elder, 1983). The groups

defining and redefining an issue need the media to help generate and intensify the general public's interest in their cause.

The *Roanoke Times* provided consistent coverage throughout the South Main Street development conflict, from its initial approval to the Blacksburg Town Council vote on Ordinance 1450. Just as both sides of the controversy cast the issue as one with serious consequences for the town's future, so did the newspaper through its coverage (Moxley, 2007, May 29a). It described the conflict as a battle "between two armies in the ongoing war for the town's future..." that had been going on for years (Moxley, 2007, May 29a). According to the newspaper, previous controversies in the town between environmental activists and pro-growth advocates over land-use and growth issues "...set the stage for a much bigger battle" (Moxley, 2007, May 29a), referring to the controversy involving Ordinance 1450. The *Roanoke Times* coverage detailed the struggle between those that believed the ordinance would protect local businesses and the small-town character of Blacksburg and the Ordinance 1450 opposition, who worried that the measure could damage the town's future retail tax base (Manese-Lee, 2007, May 19). The newspaper provided extensive backgrounds for each of the groups involved in the controversy (Moxley, 2007, May 29a) and even included feature stories focused on the development. For example, one story offered an overview of the national retailers and other stores that were joining the project (Manese-Lee, 2007, March 29), while another focused on a local couple who were working to bring a brewery to the South Main Street development (Moxley, 2007, May 1). A story about a local rugby club losing its practice field because of the development highlighted a negative consequence of the project (Fowler, 2006, November 5).

As the vote for Ordinance 1450 neared, the coverage more clearly detailed the ramifications of the vote. According to the paper, a vote against the ordinance could be seen by many in the community as a show of support for Walmart. This was described as “...a potential career killer in politics” (Moxley, 2007, May 19). A vote for the ordinance, however, could hinder years of work by the Blacksburg Partnership to attract national retailers to the town.

Most of the groups involved in the South Main Street development controversy established a web presence (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, Blacksburg United; Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, Reasons to oppose; Citizens First, Citizens First) to communicate their messages to the general public and they used advertisements to encourage Blacksburg residents to visit their websites to learn more about the groups’ perspectives on the issue (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, 2007, April 29, May 10, May 27; Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, 2007, May 27; Llamas LLC, 2007, April 29, May 2). More than any other group, however, BURG used a wide range of online tools throughout the conflict to strengthen its support and coordinate activities. While its website did include information targeted to a broad audience (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, Blacksburg United), the group used electronic newsletters and action alerts to provide important information to its core group of members, as well as an online discussion forum, where members discussed various strategies for message dissemination and coordinating efforts (Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, Google Group). Although online communication tools were used by most of the groups to reach town residents, media coverage was an extremely important factor in the South Main Street project debate, as far as bringing significant public

attention to the issue and influencing how the groups involved crafted and presented their messages.

Summary

BURG and other Ordinance 1450 supporters were extremely effective at expanding the issue beyond their group of core members to a more general audience. With their initial efforts to describe the issue as a matter of keeping a Walmart store out of the Town of Blacksburg, their message quickly evolved into an aggressive campaign highlighting the effects of a big box retailer invading the town. The group provided an overreaching definition for the issue that focused on the ways the passage of Ordinance 1450 could protect the future of Blacksburg, giving the town needed control over growth and citizens the opportunity to become an integral part of the town planning process. They supported this broad issue definition with consistent talking points involving the immediate and direct consequences of Ordinance 1450, which was presented as factual information in advertisements and newsletters and as impassioned overtures by speakers at planning commission and town council meetings.

The South Main Street Project developers, Citizens Against Ordinance 1450, and other groups opposing the measure relied too heavily on the use of long-term economic impacts to achieve issue expansion, which resulted in very sparse active support from residents. Future tax increases and the proposition that the measure would severely damage the town's efforts to recruit national retailers might have been of interest to residents, but this did not translate the same kind of immediacy and emotion as consequences such as the safety of elementary school children and the severe disruption

to charming, small-town neighborhoods, which Ordinance 1450 supporters were able to convey. The opposition's strategy to contain the issue by warning of the repercussions of rushing such an important measure fit well with their messages involving the negative consequences for the town's economic future, yet this still was not significant enough to garner strong support from Blacksburg residents. The powerful and touching story at the public hearing, where the woman discussed having no affordable shopping choices in Blacksburg and having to take public transportation to a nearby town because she could not afford to purchase groceries and other everyday items in Blacksburg, leads one to question why those groups opposing the ordinance did not try to reach out to more of these residents with their messages. The groups fighting against Ordinance 1450 consistently presented the long-term economic consequences of the measure, including the limitation of shopping choices in the town, but they did not specifically mention the possible restrictions on affordable shopping options, which are often provided by larger retailers, for the town's residents.

This exemplifies just one of the many varied implications resulting from the Town of Blacksburg's Ordinance 1450 controversy. The next chapter will further detail how this process impacted some of the key decisions made by Blacksburg Town Council and their public justifications for these decisions, as well as how the council's actions have affected the town almost three years later. In addition, the contribution to issues management research, especially involving local land-use debates, will be explored.

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Blacksburg's South Main Street project controversy has resulted in significant consequences, many of which continue to evolve and could impact the community for years to come. This issue is a fitting example of how a local land-use controversy can impact a town's government, residents, and businesses, and well as citizens' thoughts and feelings about their community. The repercussions of the local battle were and continue to be evident at a number of different levels. From direct and immediate impacts to more long-term consequences, the South Main Street project conflict reinforces the importance of using issue management techniques to better prepare for and even help influence the consequences that result when a controversial issue envelopes a community.

Following the barrage of support for Ordinance 1450 at the public hearing, Blacksburg Town Council voted unanimously to approve the measure (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). Several council members provided brief comments before casting their votes, and the statements mirrored the points made by residents during the five-hour public hearing, further demonstrating the residents' powerful role in the decision-making process. The prevailing explanation provided by council members for approving the ordinance was to help protect the character and integrity of the town. The active citizen participation in the public hearing process was cited as an example of the residents' strong sense of community. According to Blacksburg Mayor Ron Rordam, "Blacksburg is a special place. It's a special place because people like you care so much about what happens in this town" (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). The developer's changes to the proposed project were a reason used by council to justify passing the ordinance. Council members expressed disappointment that the project did not meet the

expectations that were originally proposed, with the developer drastically changing the project and assuming everyone involved would willingly accept the changes. Members also discussed the role of responsible government and the council's duty to promote thoughtful development and ensure citizen safety. Traffic problems resulting from the establishment of the large-scale commercial development were mentioned, as was the added danger for students attending the neighboring elementary school. They discussed the intentions of the ordinance, explaining it would not prohibit development, but serve as an important planning tool for responsible growth in the town that allows for citizen input on proposed projects. "It gives the town a bit of guidance for development," (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) explained council member Mary Holliman.

While the council's vote to approve Ordinance 1450 was unanimous, council members Tom Sherman and Paul Lancaster did express some concerns with approving the measure, citing the short timeframe between proposing and passing the ordinance (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29). They questioned the rationale for the square footage in the ordinance, claiming that it still needed more fine-tuning. Ordinance 1450 was described as being fast-tracked, an action which would not allow the town's planning commission sufficient time to evaluate the effects of the ordinance. According to Sherman, "This ordinance needs a lot of work," (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29) adding that he was concerned that the ordinance, as it was currently drafted, could "promote the worst kind of strip development". Lancaster worried about the division the struggle over the ordinance had created in the town. In what was one of the most memorable statements of the night, he explained, "While the debate tonight has been reasonably civilized, the lies, distortion, hyperbole, and venom on both sides has left me

disillusioned and have left this town wounded. Whatever the vote tonight, no one will win, but truth and community have lost” (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29).

Tensions in the town, which were exacerbated by the Ordinance 1450 conflict, have continued long after the approval of the measure. Lancaster lost his reelection bid for a seat on council because of what many believed to be community backlash for his support of the initial rezoning of the South Main Street project (Bardin, 2009, November 4). In November 2009, council member and Ordinance 1450 supporter Susan Anderson was re-elected to council, and three new members who each discussed the need for sustainable growth complimented with mixed-use development, which they referred to as smart growth, were elected.

The approval of Ordinance 1450 resulted in significant consequences for the Town of Blacksburg and the developers of the project. After approving the measure and attempting to enforce it, the battle went to the courtroom, which eventually reached the Virginia Supreme Court, where the court ruled in favor of the town, upholding its right to enforce Ordinance 1450 (Town of Blacksburg v. Board of Zoning Appeals). These rounds of litigation were costly for the developer and the Town of Blacksburg, which spent approximately \$170,000 of the town’s funds to support its efforts (Moxley, 2009, February 28). The ramifications for the town and the developer did not end with this ruling, however. The South Main Street commercial development, which is now called First & Main, held its grand opening in November 2008 without a big box retailer (Sturgeon, Nov. 22, 2009). A year after opening, the development was plagued with problems. While the project did attract some prominent local and national retailers and restaurants, much of its space remained empty and the developer became the target of

several lawsuits initiated not by the Town of Blacksburg, but several of its own tenants. Two First & Main retailers and a restaurant filed suit against the developers, claiming they did not provide the type of retail environment originally promised. Of particular concern was the absence of a movie theater and a medium to large-sized retailer, which would help boost the number of shoppers for the smaller stores. The struggles of First & Main certainly have direct consequences for the developer of the project, but also for the Town of Blacksburg. The more financially successful the development, the greater the tax revenue would be for the town.

The town and the First & Main developers also clashed over plans to include a Sonic Drive-In restaurant at the South Main location (Moxley, 2008, November 12). Blacksburg Town Council originally denied the restaurant's application request due to concerns about pedestrian access and the amount of noise and other kinds of pollution that would be generated from a drive-in. Sonic and the developers jointly filed a lawsuit, claiming that the town's denial of the request was as an act of political retribution. After private meetings with Sonic representatives, council approved an application that included several conditions involving pedestrian access and signage, although as of April 2010, construction has yet to begin on the restaurant (Sturgeon, 2009, November 22).

Even after the court decision, the developers believed there was a chance the town might still consider approving a big box store for the development by granting a special use permit under the provisions of Ordinance 1450 (Sturgeon, 2009, November 22). This did not seem very probable, however, especially after town council approved Ordinance 1509, which reduced even further the requirement for special approval of retail developments from 80,000 to 50,000 square feet (Moxley, 2009, February 12). The

measure, which was approved in February 2009, also placed design restrictions on new developments in an effort to avoid the construction of retail stores that have a big box store appearance. The impacts of the South Main Street development conflict can still be seen after the legal resolution of the Ordinance 1450 issue. Both the town and the developers continue to deal with economic, legal, and planning problems three years after the Ordinance 1450 decision.

This work demonstrates the political power citizen-led groups can wield and how they can effectively become a voice for the future of their community. BURG and its supporters spearheaded an effort that not only resulted in local government officials taking a specific political stand on an issue, which resulted in legislative action, but their continued commitment to support their decision through costly court battles and the creation and approval of an even more aggressive measure to control retail development. This supports Cobb and Elder's (1983) claim that the pre-decisional stage of the political process is when citizens and groups can truly make an impact. It also supports their conclusion that the definition that can generate the most support and interest will be the most likely to prevail. This case study demonstrates a clear connection between the establishment of issue characteristics presented by Cobb and Elder (1983) and public interest and involvement. In addition, it shows how some of these characteristics can resonate more strongly with an audience than others, which could be a topic for more exploration. This supports the overall idea that by reaching a broad audience through issue expansion messages, groups can indirectly influence the decisions of policymakers.

While an overwhelming majority of residents at the public hearing supported Ordinance 1450, there were only 108 residents who actually took to the podium to voice

their support (Town of Blacksburg, 2007, May 29), which is a very small percentage of Blacksburg residents. Accepting a definition may not always equate to issue involvement, however. It is possible that more residents actually accepted the issue definition presented by the groups opposing Ordinance 1450, yet BURG and other supporters of the ordinance were able to carry this a step further, convincing residents to not only accept their issue definition, but to actively join their cause. While this indirectly demonstrates the power of the citizen in local politics as Dahl (1961) describes, it certainly affirms the political influence of local groups. Perhaps this also explains why those battling against the approval of the measure did not actively target citizens of a lower socioeconomic class who would benefit from a large scale retailer in the town because of the more affordable merchandise it would provide, since it has been shown that residents who are more financially secure experience higher rates of political participation (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

As the successes of BURG and other Ordinance 1450 supporters demonstrate the power antigrowth movements can have in a community experiencing a conflict over a land-use issue, they also show how the traditional growth model concerning these types of issues have evolved as ideas about more conservative growth and concerns about the environmental and community-related consequences of growth have continued to gain prominence, especially involving big box retailers. As Adams (2007) suggests, residents are increasingly viewing land-use issues as symbols for the future of their community that depict their area's societal priorities, which could help explain why these issues contribute to such severe political division.

Groups on both sides of the Ordinance 1450 conflict recognized that the debate in the community was about much more than a zoning ordinance or a big box store, which is why they attempted to define the issue as one that would have a tremendous impact on the future of Blacksburg, far beyond the South Main Street development project. Ordinance 1450 supporters were much more effective at supporting this broad definition with points involving the immediate and direct consequences of not passing the measure. By highlighting a wide range of consequences throughout the controversy, they were able to recast the issue definition, creating more opportunities for residents who may have had different views concerning their desired future for their community to find some aspect of the issue with which they could identify.

The issue expansion success detailed in this case study supports the idea that an issue definition can influence the progression of an issue and play an important role in its resolution. It also shows that there are specific points in an issue's evolution that are critical to either its advancement or containment. Scholars have stressed the importance of effective issue management programs for organizations to prepare them for identifying changes and opportunities before it is too late to take meaningful action (Regester & Larkin, 2005). The South Main Street project controversy clearly demonstrates the substantial effects issue definition and expansion can have on the development of an issue. It also serves as an example of why issue management programs, as well as an understanding and appreciation of the predictable course issues follow as they evolve, can benefit an organization. Even though the South Main Street project developers and other groups that opposed Ordinance 1450 did attempt to expand their definition of the issue to gather public support, they were much less aggressive in their approach than

ordinance supporters and focused much of their efforts on the economic consequences Ordinance 1450 would create for the town and its residents. While groups on both sides of the issue created a definition hinged on future impacts, those promoting opposition to the measure predominately supported their issue definition in terms of shopping choices, tax increases, and economic growth, while BURG and other supporters used more diverse and immediate consequences to advance their definition, which provided more opportunities for residents to identify with their side of the issue. Since they enjoyed strong community support when the development was first proposed to Blacksburg Town Council, perhaps the developers overlooked the concerns expressed by a few residents during this initial stage (Town of Blacksburg, 2006, May 9), which signaled a developing conflict. The Ordinance 1450 opposition groups' inability to successfully influence the issue before it had advanced so far that negative impacts were virtually irreversible resulted in a myriad of damaging consequences, including financial loss, litigation, and government regulation.

Of course, this study provides an analysis of only one instance of a conflict occurring between groups battling for public support of an issue definition. While it does add to a collection of existing case studies concerning the effects of issue management strategy (Adams, 2007; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Davis, 1995; Regester & Larkin, 2005), more examples are needed to include issues that encompass a variety of situations, organizations, interest groups, and target publics. This is especially needed in the area of local land-use issues, which seem to be becoming increasingly important to local governments and communities as citizens become more interested in development issues and how they will affect the future of the places where they live.

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APPENDIX A. Blacksburg Partnership Discourse

Advertisement

1. The Blacksburg Partnership. "The Blacksburg Partnership." *Roanoke Times*, 27 May 2007.

APPENDIX B. Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth (BURG) Discourse

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2. Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth. "What will a 179,000 sq. ft. big box store on S. Main Street in Blacksburg bring?" *Roanoke Times*, 29 April 2007.
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4. Lori Blanc. "RE: BURG: Contact Adam Fishman and Fairmount Properties." 12 April 2007.
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6. dbres...@vt.edu. "Letter to Fishmman and strategy." 12 April 2007.
7. Mark Lattanzi. "Ordinance 1450." 12 April 2007.
8. Deborah Young. "protest today." 12 April 2007.
9. Leslie Hager-Smith. "alternative 'big box'." 13 April 2007
10. blondezilla27. "Re: BURG: Statement from Jeanne Stosser (the land owner of the south main property)." 13 April 2007.
11. Mark Lattanzi. "Re: BURG: Statement from Jeanne Stosser (the land owner of the south main property)." 13 April 2007.

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14. blondezilla27. "Tom Sherman's reply to my e-mail." 14 April 2007.
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16. homebody. "RE: BURG: Tom Sherman's reply to my e-mail." 14 April 2007.
17. Mark Lattanzi. "what's next?" 18 April 2007.
18. shawn brenneman. "farmer's market." 21 April 2007.
19. cwest...@vt.edu. "Status." 22 April 2007.
20. blondezilla27. "BURG t-shirt design." 23 April 2007.
21. Homebody. "help needed." 24 April 2007.
22. Mark Lattanzi. "Re: lawyer." 24 April 2007.
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27. Homebody. "Sign the petition for responsible retail growth." 30 April 2007.
28. Yddub. "See you all tomorrow nite." 30 April 2007.
29. Daniel Breslau. "Update." 2 May 2007.

30. shawn brenneman. "Re: BURG: proposal for BURG public meeting." 3 May 2007.
31. shawn brenneman. "Re: BURG: Re: What do we know?" 3 May 2007.
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34. shawn brenneman. "Re: BURG: Re: info on the planning dept's honest mistake." 4 May 2007.
35. Mark Lattanzi. "info on the planning dept's honest mistake." 4 May 2007.
36. Chuck & Teri Hoover. "RE: BURG: info on the planning dept's honest mistake." 4 May 2007.
37. T Hoover. "Re: BURG: Re: info on the planning dept's honest mistake." 4 May 2007.
38. Daniel Breslau. "The 'innocent mistake' that could become a Walmart" 5 May 2007.
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41. Eva. "Some ideas for publicity, web page, downtown presence, fundraisers and dialogue." 7 May 2007.
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43. Michael Hudson. "For those of you not on the citizens first list here is their announcement." 7 May 2007.
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48. Kathy Huser. "Town Council Meeting." 8 May 2007.
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50. Mike Anderson. "Contacting Blacksburg Brewery & Chophouse" 9 May 2007.
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53. Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth. "Wal-Mart is Coming! Save Our Town: Support Ordinance 1450." 10 May 2007.
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55. Jason Johannessen. "Rebecca Riley, and Anchor, and AstroTurf." 10 May 2007.
56. P. "Lawyer?" 10 May 2007.
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64. Satterwhite, Emily. "RE: BURG: Re: tax 'revenue' 12 May 2007.
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68. Kay Kay Goette. "Re: new petition?" 16 May 2007.
69. Guest, Carol Lee. "Re: BURG: new petition?" 16 May 2007.
70. Kathy Huser. "RE: BURG: petitions 16 May 2007.
71. Lydia. "Re: BURG: Re: new petition?" 16 May 2007.
72. Lydia. "petitions.", 16 May 2007.
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74. Daniel Breslau. "your piece this morning." 19 May 2007.
75. Marbar...@aol.com. "Fwd: Ordinance 1450 -- please vote yes." 20 May 2007.
76. Satterwhite, Emily. "success against Wal-mart – tactics in OR." 21 May 2007.
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78. Daniel Breslau. "ad for the lyric." 22 May 2007.

79. Daniel Breslau. "RE: BURG: Total signature count" 22 May 2007.
80. Homebody. "call from 1450 opponents." 22 May 2007.
81. Homebody. "downtown revitalization." 22 May 2007.
82. David I. Lehn. "RE: BURG: call from 1450 opponents." 22 May 2007.
83. gmknobl. "Re: call from 1450 opponents." 23 May 2007.
84. Emily Satterwhite. "Fairmount's flyers in mailboxers." 23 May 2007.
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86. Betty. "Phone calls against 1450." 24 May 2007.
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89. Daniel Breslau. "Illegal tactics of opponents of Ordinance 1450." 24 May 2007.
90. gmknobl. "We need a new ad." 24 May 2007.
91. Guest, Carol Lee. "RE: BURG: Re: Fairmount's flyers in mailboxes." 24 May 2007.
92. Guest, Carol Lee. "RE: BURG: We need a new ad." 24 May 2007.
93. Michael Hudson. "Time For A Shake Up Of Town Staff?" 24 May 2007.
94. Emily Satterwhite. "Big Box Impacts." 24 May 2007.
95. Emily Satterwhite. "Blacksburg Partnership opposes 1450?" 24 May 2007.
96. Daniel Breslau. "Sample letter: ad in today's Current." 27 May 2007.
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98. Leslie Hager-Smith. "Re: BURG: Re: stop 1450 signs today." 27 May 2007.
99. Kathy Huser. "Downtown Blacksburg." 27 May 2007.

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102. Daniel Breslau. "Important reminder: petitions." 28 May 2007.
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108. Kathy Huser. "RE: BURG: Sales taxes." 29 May 2007.
109. P. "Sales taxes." 29 May 2007.
110. P. "Re: BURG: Sales taxes." 30 May 2007.
111. Margaret Radcliffe. "Re: BURG: Re: Sales taxes." 30 May 2007.
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APPENDIX C. Citizens Against Ordinance 1450 Discourse

Advertisement

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Website

2. Citizens Against Ordinance 1450. “About Citizens Against Ordinance 1450.”
3. Citizens Against Ordinance 1450. “Reasons to Oppose Blacksburg’s Ordinance 1450.”
4. Citizens Against Ordinance 1450. “Take Action.”

APPENDIX D. Citizens First Discourse

Advertisement

1. Citizens First. "Citizens First Supports South Main Street Development."
Roanoke Times, 8 May 2007.

Citizens First online forum

2. michaelhudson. "Should approval be required of retailers who would like to build 'Big Box' type stores here in Blacksburg? Discuss it here." 2 April 2007.
3. Gail. "Big Box." 9 April 2007.
4. gmknobl. "1450." 9 April 2007.
5. homebody. "What we can do to stop Wal-Mart." 9 April 2007.
6. michaelhudson. "Big Boxes, Consiquences and Town Values." 11 April 2007.
7. dagray3. "Future Eyesore." 13 April 2007.
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APPENDIX E. South Main Street Developer Discourse

Advertisement

1. Llamas LLC. “Blacksburg has finally attracted national Retailers and Restaurants.” *Roanoke Times*, 29 April 2007.
2. Llamas LLC. “Stop Driving. Start Shopping.” *Roanoke Times*, 2 May 2007.

Other

3. Llamas LLC. “Responsible Economic Development of Blacksburg.”
<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/blacksburgresponsiblegrowth/>
4. Jeannie Stosser. “A Position Statement from Jeannie Stosser and Georgia Anne Faulkenham.” 12 April 2007.

APPENDIX F. Blacksburg Residents and Government Officials Discourse

Blacksburg Town Council and Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

1. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes.” 7 February 2006.
2. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes.” 7 March 2006.
3. 2006.
4. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes.” 4 April 2006.
5. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes.” 9 May 2006.
6. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes.” 27 March 2007.
7. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes.” 3 April 2007.
8. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes.” 3 April 2007.
9. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes.” 10 April 2007.
10. Town of Blacksburg. “Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes.” 1 May 2007.

11. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes." 8 May 2007.
12. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Town Council: Meeting Minutes." 22 May 2007.
13. Town of Blacksburg. "Joint meeting of the Blacksburg Town Council and Blacksburg Planning Commission: Meeting Minutes." 29 May 2007.

WTOB Broadcast of Blacksburg Town Council and Planning Commission Meetings

14. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Planning Commission: WTOB Broadcast." 3 April 2007.
15. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Planning Commission: WTOB Broadcast." 4 April 2006.
16. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Planning Commission: WTOB Broadcast." 2 May 2007.
17. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Town Council: WTOB Broadcast." 9 May 2006.
18. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Town Council: WTOB Broadcast." 8 May 2007.
19. Town of Blacksburg. "Blacksburg Town Council: WTOB Broadcast." 22 May 2007.
20. Town of Blacksburg. "Joint meeting of the Blacksburg Town Council and Blacksburg Planning Commission: WTOB Broadcast." 29 May 2007.

APPENDIX G. *Roanoke Times* Discourse

News articles

1. Tonia Moxley. "South Main Plan On Its Way To Town Council." 11 April 2006.
2. Tonia Moxley. "Citizens First Makes 1 Endorsement In Blacksburg." 13 April 2006.
3. Tonia Moxley. "Blacksburg Incumbent Seeks Landmark 9th Term." 28 April 2006.
4. Tonia Moxley. "Blacksburg Candidates Take On An Array Of Issues." 29 April 2006.
5. Tonia Moxley. "Candidates Pitch Ideas For Aiding Downtown\ Voters Make Their Call On Tuesday." 30 April 2006.
6. Tonia Moxley. "Forum Heats Up Mayoral Race." 30 April 2006.
7. Tonia Moxley. "Rordam Wins In Blacksburg." 3 May 2006.
8. Tonia Moxley. "Council Oks Plan For New Retail Hub." 11 May 2006.
9. Angela Manese-Lee. "Will Three Large-Scale Developments Transform Blacksburg Into A Shopping Destination? Or Will All The New Retail Space Be Too Much To Handle?" 22 May 2006.
10. Tonia Moxley. "Longtime Activist Joins Blacksburg Council." 7 July 2006.
11. Tonia Moxley. "Blacksburg Council Appoints Holliman To Fill Vacant Seat." 12 July 2006.
12. Hart Fowler. "Blacksburg Rugby Club Will Soon Be Homeless." 5 November 2006.

13. Tonia Moxley. "Citizens First Plans To Reorganize, Reenergize." 9 December 2006.
14. Tonia Moxley. "High Court Listens To Sewer Case Arguments." 12 January 2007.
15. Tonia Moxley. "High Court Ends Town's Sewer Fight." *Roanoke Times*, 3 March 2007.
16. Angela Manese-Lee. "Big Names Line Up For South Main." *Roanoke Times*, March 29 2007.
17. Tonia Moxley. "Blacksburg Council Mulls Big-Box Development." *Roanoke Times*, 29 March 2007.
18. Tonia Moxley. "Blacksburg Wal-Mart Opponents Organize Around South Main Development." *Roanoke Times*, 10 April 2007.
19. Tonia Moxley. "Wal-Mart Critics Appeal To Blacksburg Council." *Roanoke Times*, 11 April 2007.
20. Tonia Moxley. "Developer Speaks Out Amid 'Big-Box' Protest." *Roanoke Times*, 13 April 2007.
21. Tonia Moxley. "Plans In Works For Blacksburg Brew Pub." *Roanoke Times*, 1 May 2007.
22. Tonia Moxley. "Ad Error Delays Big-Box Vote, Stirs Debate." *Roanoke Times*, 4 May 2007.
23. Tonia Moxley. "Big-Box Debate Consumes Meeting." *Roanoke Times*, 9 May 2007.

24. Tonia Moxley. "Developers File Lawsuit Against Blacksburg." *Roanoke Times*, 11 May 2007.
25. Tonia Moxley. "Council Majority Unclear On Big-Box Ordinance." *Roanoke Times*, 19 May 2007.
26. Angela Manese-Lee. "Kroger Expansion Plans Wait For Approval." *Roanoke Times*, 19 May 2007.
27. Tonia Moxley. "Groups Pulling Out All Stops In Big-Box Fight." *Roanoke Times*, 29 May 2007.
28. Tonia Moxley. "Personalities, Politics And Blacksburg's Future Merge Tonight." *Roanoke Times*, 29 May 2007.
29. Tonia Moxley. "Big-Box Vote." *Roanoke Times*, 30 May 2007.
30. Tonia Moxley. "No Decision." *Roanoke Times*, 30 May 2007.
31. Tonia Moxley. "More Debate." *Roanoke Times*, 31 May 2007.

Editorials

32. "Blacksburg Faces A Big-Box Dilemma." *Roanoke Times*, 1 April 2007.

Columns

33. H.C. "Chuck" Rogol. "Questions For Blacksburg's Town Manager." *Roanoke Times*, 28 May 2006.
34. Michael Miller. "Could I Have A Side Of Boxers With That Sandwich, Please?" *Roanoke Times*, 18 June 2006.

35. Kurt Stephenson. "Consider All Facets Of A Big-Box Ordinance." *Roanoke Times*, 15 April 2007.
36. Michael Miller. "Blacksburg Takes Itself Too Seriously." *Roanoke Times*, 1 May 2007.
37. Rebecca Riley. "Blacksburg Needs South Main Development." *Roanoke Times*, 6 May 2007.
38. Chuck Rogol. "Blacksburg Should Have Seen Troubles Coming." *Roanoke Times*, 6 May 2007.
39. Geoffrey Knobl. "South Main Developers Present Misleading Ads." *Roanoke Times*, 13 May 2007.
40. Ann Hamlin Linden. "Blacksburg Sells Its Soul." *Roanoke Times*, 13 May 2007.
41. Christian Trejbal. "Resentment Surfaces In The Wal-Mart Brawl." *Roanoke Times*, 13 May 2007.
42. Sam G. Riley. "Seek Compromise On Big-Box Development." *Roanoke Times*, 27 May 2007.
43. Roger Hedgepeth. "Pay Off Big-Box Developers." *Roanoke Times*, 27 May 2007.
44. Emily Satterwhite. "Pay Off Big-Box Developers." *Roanoke Times*, 27 May 2007.

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45. Doug Mauer. "Blacksburg needs more retail shops." *Roanoke Times*, 7 May 2006.
46. Margaret Breslau. "Council acted too hastily." *Roanoke Times*, 21 May 2006.
47. R.K. Smith. "A sleeping giant awakened?" *Roanoke Times*, 21 May 2006.
48. Steve Bodtke. "Hedgepeth shows how to lead?" *Roanoke Times*, 28 May 2006.

49. Toby Rock. "You mean that Don Langrehr?" *Roanoke Times*, 28 May 2006.
50. Donald R. Sunshine. "Help development help downtown." *Roanoke Times*, 28 May 2006.
51. Carol Guest. "Use vote to oppose ordinance change." *Roanoke Times*, 30 May 2006.
52. Michael Konen. "A plan to remove Blacksburg's blight." *Roanoke Times*, 15 June 2006.
53. Bert Rogel. "Cut the 'stand up' council theatrics." *Roanoke Times*, 20 August 2006.
54. Rosemarie G. Sawdon. "Preserve wetland amid development." *Roanoke Times*, 17 September 2006.
55. Shawn Brenneman. "Residents deserve a say on Wal-Mart." *Roanoke Times*, 6 May 2007.
56. Jane Sprague. "Blacksburg needs a big-box ordinance." *Roanoke Times*, 6 May 2007.