

**The "Community" in
Community-Based Environmental Protection**

Synopsis Report

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Project Goal

The goal of this one-year project was to determine whether the term "community" can be used meaningfully and operationalized within the context of place-based environmental protection, and if so under what circumstances.

We had three objectives:

- (1) to identify the essential attributes of "community," in order to arrive at a flexible but reasonably precise definition of the term;
- (2) to examine how the term "community" is used currently within various community-based environmental protection efforts, and the extent to which various usages do or don't (and can or can't) comport with the meaning of community; and
- (3) to examine ways in which selected community-based environmental protection efforts are adapting in order to become more fully community-based.

The project began in August 1996 and was conducted by Mary English, the principal investigator, with Meg Zimlich, a graduate student in sociology who served as a research assistant to the project. The project sets the stage for further work on ways to improve consultative, community-based environmental decisions.

Background

In environmental policy, as in other realms of public policy, the term community is in vogue for several reasons. First, it serves as shorthand for "affected and/or interested parties" who need to be consulted because of ethical and/or practical considerations. Second, it suggests that there are shared views that can be tapped by talking with a few people, rather than attempting the impossible task of consulting everyone potentially affected or interested. Correspondingly, the term is used by people who, on issues of concern to them, claim to "speak for the community." And third, community is a "good feeling" word: it evokes Norman Rockwell images of a heart-warming past.

Within the field of environmental protection, the term community is used in at least four instances:

(1) *Proponents of site-specific initiatives and their regulators may seek interaction with "the community" — for example, concerning the siting of a landfill, the extension of a greenway, the development of a shopping center, the cleanup of a contaminated site. In such instances, consultation with local elected and administrative officials may be seen as important but inadequate; legitimation and widespread acceptance of the decision may be sought by using a process that includes community consultation. Sometimes, the outcomes of the process may substantially affect the decision — either in its details (e.g., where the landfill should be sited) or in its broad scope (e.g., whether a new landfill is needed at all).*

(2) *Local plans developed by professional staff (e.g., for economic development, land use, and growth management) usually include at least nominal consultation with "the community." While this practice has, at least in theory, been going on for decades, the consultative aspects of planning have been emphasized in recent years. Current buzzwords include "visioning" to develop "sustainable communities."*

(3) *Environmental policies that previously were made at the federal or state level may be partially devolved to the local, "community" level — e.g., policies concerning either the timing of or standards for attainment of acceptable pollution levels in various media (air, water, soil) by various contaminants. The underlying idea is that each area is different with respect to its worst pollution problems, its most vulnerable populations, and its aspirations, including but not limited to economic aspirations. To the extent that devolution occurs, consultation of local officials with "the community" typically is required before local environmental priorities can be set and locally tailored requirements adopted.*

(4) *Various interest-based "communities" may be consulted when broad national or state policies are to be established (e.g., policies concerning the reform of the Superfund law and its liability principles; policies concerning the allocation of cleanup funds across the US*

Department of Energy's defense complex). In such instances, references may be made to "the business community" or "the environmental community" — references to people who share, not a place, but a point of view.

In this research project, we focused on the first three uses of the term community within the field of environmental protection. Nevertheless, the fourth, non-location-specific usage is interesting and important, and it provides insights for what community does or doesn't mean when tied to a specific place.

Research Approach

This project included both theoretical and empirical research:

- **Literature review.** Based upon a literature review, we distilled and integrated various theoretical interpretations of community. "Community" has been the subject of a great deal of inquiry over many years within the disciplines of, e.g., sociology, political science, and philosophy. This scholarly literature, while it has not resulted in one universally accepted definition of community, offered insights which help to flesh out, for the purposes of this project, both a conception of community and a framework for analyzing community within the context of place-based environmental protection activities.
- **Interviews.** Through a series of phone and face-to-face interviews, we identified patterns (and discrepancies) in the way that the term community is being used by selected federal officials and leaders of community-based organizations engaged in environmental protection or other related activities. These interviews were structured using questions developed from the theoretical phase of the project.
- **Case studies.** Through three case studies, we investigated how the concept of community has played out in three local environmental protection efforts. We did so in order to assess how different place-based environmental protection efforts define the term community, whether those definitions change over time, and well they appeared to work in terms of the effort at hand.

Findings and Conclusions from the Literature Review

Definitions of community abound; few scholars wholly agree on what is meant by the term. It is used normatively as well as descriptively, and it is employed in a wide variety of ways. Radically compressed from a wide range of material (see the bibliography), these usages of community include:

Community as a formal or informal social entity:

Community grounded in law:
a unit of governance.

Community as a social system:
a large or small social unit, based mainly on association, division of labor, etc.

Community as a place:

Community as territory:
the space in which a group of people live their lives.

Community as planned space:
space that is organized to achieve certain social and environmental effects.

Community as a group with a shared outlook:

Community grounded in values and beliefs:
a social entity in which people have similar perspectives and the community helps shape those perspectives.

Community as a moral entity:
a primary source of moral virtue.

Community as a form of interaction:

Community as a process, not a thing:
a dynamic, changing form of social relationship.

Community as politics:
participation and unification in public action and public spiritedness.

Key Attributes of Community

As revealed in our literature review, the term community varies in its usage. In addition to the distinctions noted above, one major distinction is community as a *thing* versus community as a *feeling*. This distinction is revealed through usage: "the community" versus "sense of community." Another major distinction is community as a *reality* that exists, tangibly or intangibly, versus community as an *ideal* to be sought after. A third major distinction is community as primarily a *political* entity versus community as primarily *apolitical*, as shared but private. These distinctions suggest tilts in one direction or another, but they do not negate each other.

Despite the multiplicity of scholarly definitions of community, there are some common themes. From our literature review, we gleaned the attributes of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs as key attributes (i.e., necessary and, taken together, sufficient conditions) for "a community." In addition, in light of the topic of our research (community-based environmental protection), we added a fourth attribute, shared territory, as potentially essential. As noted toward the end of this report, however (see "Hard Questions"), trying to specify these attributes raises more questions than it answers.

Social interaction. Social interaction has been called "a face-to-face encounter between two or more people in which each person takes the other into account" (Poplin 1972, 17). This interpretation bears some scrutiny. While some social interaction must be face-to-face (people like to put faces with names), other forms of interaction are possible: for example, the interaction could be phone-to-phone or e-mail-to-e-mail and yet still have much of the content of meaningful social interaction. Furthermore, each social interaction within a community will not involve all members of the community. Instead, what matters is the *denseness* of social interaction -- that is, the number and frequency of small social interactions among various community members.

Common ties. Common ties can be cultural -- they can grow by sharing values, norms, goals, and beliefs -- or psychological -- they can arise through a sense of belonging together, of identifying with one community as distinct from others. Cultural and psychological ties are likely to be mutually reinforcing. Together, they create a "we" feeling and also, less attractively, a "them" feeling ... solidarity defined not only by affinity but also by exclusion.

Mutual satisfaction of needs. Mutual satisfaction of needs is seen by some researchers as an essential feature of a community:

[a community is] a grouping of people who reside in a specific locality and who

exercise a degree of local autonomy in organizing their social life in such a way that they can, from that locality base, satisfy the full range of their daily needs. (Edwards and Jones 1976, 12)

Strictly speaking, this interpretation would exclude all but the most isolated, self-sufficient settlements. Surely that is not intended. Instead, the definition suggests an important attribute of a community: the ability and inclination of the community to serve as a primary source of (but not necessarily the sole source of) the means by which daily needs are met.

These daily needs are varied in their nature: They might include material needs, but they might also extend to intellectual and emotional needs.

Shared territory. A common geographic area can be an important basis for a community: by sharing physical surroundings and daily physical experiences, it can be part of the "glue" that holds a community together. It can be a topic for social interaction, a basis for common ties, and a means for satisfying one's own and each others' needs. In addition, shared territory is a seemingly essential attribute of community for a community-based environmental protection effort, since the place, or territory, typically provides a focus for the community's efforts.

Findings and Conclusions from Interviews

In early 1997, following our literature review, we conducted a series of telephone interviews with leaders of community-based organizations around Tennessee. We also conducted a similar set of face-to-face interviews with selected staff personnel at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A total of 20 leaders of community-based organizations and four EPA officials were interviewed.

For interviews with leaders of community-based organizations in Tennessee, we initially planned to include only *environmental* organizations. Because we were unable to identify a sufficient number of such organizations, however, we also interviewed leaders of a few other community-based groups whose concerns include but are not limited to environmental issues. We obtained the names of organizations and interviewees from two Tennessee groups -- the Tennessee Environmental Council (an "umbrella" environmental organization) and the Highlander Research and Education Center (which promotes community empowerment) -- and from the *Directory of Community Organizations* (Verna M. Fausey, ed., Southern Neighborhoods Network, October 1996). The EPA personnel interviewed included staff from the Office of Research and Development, the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances, and the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation, including but not limited to its Community-Based Environmental Protection (CBEP) program.

The interviews for both groups were semi-structured and followed a set of pre-determined questions developed following our literature review. The questions used in the interviews are clustered below by topic, followed by a very brief summary of the responses received from, respectively, those interviewed from Tennessee community-based organizations and from EPA headquarters.

Identifying Communities: Physical Traits

1) Does the community that you work with have geographic boundaries? In other words, is it territorially defined?

1a) Roughly what types of boundaries does it have? For example, does it follow political boundaries such as town lines, or environmental boundaries such as streams or major roads?

Community-based organizations:

Virtually all of their communities are territorially defined, many by environmental boundaries (streams, roads, etc.).

EPA:

For most of those interviewed, their work concerns communities defined by either jurisdictional or environmental boundaries. For one respondent, however, national "communities of interest" are the focus.

Identifying Community Members: Social Traits

1b) To be a community member, does a person need to live or work within the community, or can he be located elsewhere?

2) Do you consider people who do not actively participate in the community's affairs to be community members? For example, if a person just comes and goes from home without talking with any of her neighbors, is she still a member of that community?

3) Are there any other key traits a person must have to count as a community member?

3a) Briefly, what are those traits?

Community-based organizations:

Views differ. Some respondents emphasized residence in the community; others; involvement in its activities and concerns. Several respondents were reluctant to specify who should and shouldn't count as a community member.

EPA:

Being affected, being concerned ... these attributes are enough to qualify people as a community member, unless a definition of community as "shared culture" is used.

Issue-Based Communities

4) If people of similar views start to speak out on a particular issue, such as a proposed hazardous waste facility, should they be called "a community," and if so, at what point?

4a) What if people start to speak out and interact with each other on a particular issue, but they hold different views--are they still forming a community with each other?

5) Within a community, then, do you generally expect to hear divergent views?

Community-based organizations:

A number of respondents think that issue-based communities are not true communities -- a term they reserve for communities of place. Virtually all expect to hear divergent views within their communities.

EPA:

People who hold similar views and speak out on an issue constitute a community, all respondents indicated. In addition, if people share the same space they may hold divergent views and still be called a community, according to most but not all of the respondents.

Degrees of "Community-ness"

6. Do you think there are degrees of "community-ness"? In other words, are some communities stronger than others?

6a) As far as you can tell, what characteristics make some communities stronger than others?

Community-based organizations:

According to the respondents, communities become stronger as they have more social interactions of various sorts, more common ties, and more political clout.

EPA:

Communities with shared culture, values, and opinions and the ability to act tend to have more "community-ness."

The True Voice of the Community

7) Do you worry about whether you are hearing the "true" voice of the community?

7a) How do you deal with this?

8) For a given environmental issue, are you ever just not sure who "the community" is, or whether there is one at all?

8a) What do you do in these situations?

Community-based organizations:

While most respondents are fairly sure of who the community is for a given issue, a number worry about hearing the community's true voice. Of those who do worry about hearing the true voice of the community, all said they try to elicit it through one- and two-way information exchange mechanisms such as fliers, newsletters, and community meetings.

EPA:

Hearing the true voice of the community is a concern, but techniques such as cultural profiles and "knowing the community" can lessen this concern, according to several respondents.

Multiple Communities

9) For a given environmental issue, do you ever have more than one community involved in the issue?

9a) What do you do then? For example, do you try to get the communities together, or do you get in touch with them separately?

Community-based organizations:

All of the respondents indicated that more than one community could be involved in a given issue, and most said that they try to get these communities together to create common solutions.

EPA:

All indicated that more than one community could be involved in a given issue, and most said that situation-specific strategies would be needed for dealing with this.

Definitions of "Community" -- Pros and Cons

10) To quickly sum up -- For the purposes of your work, how would you define the term "community"?

11) As far as you can tell, does your definition of "community" have any major advantages or disadvantages?

11a) *What are the key disadvantages?*

11b) *And what are the key advantages?*

Community-based organizations:

Most respondents consider shared territory to be an essential attribute of community but include other traits as well, such as interaction on common interests and problems. While some respondents saw broadly inclusive definitions of community as offering advantages, at least one preferred a clearly bounded definition.

EPA:

Most respondents consider shared territory to be just one attribute of community, and then, not always an essential attribute. Respondents differed, however, in which human attributes are most central to a community: being affected by an environmental problem, being interested and speaking out on the problem, or interacting as a group in various ways within a larger network of groups. Each definition was due in part to the nature of the respondent's work, and each was seen as having both advantages and disadvantages.

Final Thoughts

12) *Are there any others comments you'd like to make about the issue of defining the community for environmental issues?*

Community-based organizations:

While some respondents view community as having fairly strong boundaries grounded in shared roots, problems, and interests, others take a somewhat more elastic view of how communities should be defined.

EPA:

One respondent commented that it's a very difficult issue; two others cautioned against being overly academic, saying that people should be allowed to self-identify and that the main thing is to get them motivated to do something.

Assessment of Interview Results

These interviews were exploratory and, because of project limitations, fairly limited in number. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn about how the term "community" is conceptualized by two key sets of people engaged in community-based environmental protection: leaders of community-based organizations and EPA staff members. While the responsibilities and the vantage points of those interviewed are quite different (within each set, as well as between the sets), the commonalities and differences in their conceptions of community for their work are interesting in themselves and reveal some potential disconnects.

Areas of Commonality:

- *Territory as a starting point.* Most use territory as a starting point for defining a community, although some EPA officials said that shared territory was not always an essential attribute. In identifying the territory, the leaders of community-based organizations tend to use environmental boundaries such as streams or roads, while some EPA officials use jurisdictional as well as environmental boundaries.
- *Other key social traits.* Most agree that a community has other key traits beyond shared territory, such as interaction on common interests and problems. All agree that communities become stronger as they have more shared culture, values, and opinions; more social interaction; and more ability and inclination to act.
- *Heterogeneity.* Most agree that divergent views may be found within a community. Most also agree that more than one community can be involved in a given issue, and that situation-specific strategies are needed for dealing with this.

Areas of Difference or Uncertainty:

- *Qualifications for community membership.* Views differ on who should count as a community member -- particularly, on whether simply living in a place is enough to qualify a person as a member of community, or whether involvement in the community's activities and concerns was also essential. While several leaders of community-based organizations were reluctant to specify who should and shouldn't be counted as a member of a community, the leaders of community-based organizations tended as a group to have more stringent requirements for community members, expecting more involvement from them, than the EPA officials did. The EPA officials, in contrast, were as a whole quite unexact about who should count as community member: In general, they said that simply being affected was sufficient. In addition, some EPA officials added that simply being concerned was enough.

- *Issue-based communities.* Views differ on whether issue-based communities are true communities. Leaders of community-based organizations tend to think that they are not, reserving "community" for communities of place, whereas EPA officials tend to think that people who hold similar views and speak out on an issue constitute a community.
- *Concern about hearing the community's "true voice."* EPA officials and some (but not all) leaders of community-based organizations worry about hearing the "true voice" of the community. Of those who do worry about this, EPA officials tended to emphasize getting to know the community, while leaders of community-based organizations emphasized one- and two-way information exchange on an issue of concern.

Implications

The interviewees' conceptions of community are not worlds apart, but there are important differences. EPA officials are likely to define community at a fairly large scale, although still place-based, and are then likely to be inclusive about who counts a member of the community. Leaders of community-based organizations tend to define community at a smaller scale and to have higher expectations of community members. All tacitly agree with each other (and with the scholarly literature, as distilled in this project) on what the ideal characteristics of community are, but they differ in the extent to which they use this ideal as a measuring rod for identifying a community.

It appears that all would agree that the social attributes of community discussed above -- social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs -- should be fostered. But there may be different views about the extent to which those attributes already exist, especially around a community-based environmental protection effort, and about whether they *can* be fostered.

Findings and Conclusions from Case Studies

Three Knoxville-based environmental protection projects were chosen for brief case studies: the Second Creek Restoration Project, the Brownfield Pilot Project, and the Project 2000 Recycling Program. After selecting these projects, we sought the help of three people closely connected with them who could provide background information and advice, including advice on other project-related people who should be interviewed. We then developed a set of questions concerning the project's initial definition of "community," changes in the definition that had occurred over time, and the nature of the project's community interactions. Each person interviewed was asked roughly the same set of questions, with variations to reflect differences in the projects. Information was gathered in the Spring of 1997. Most of the interviews were face-to-face.

The Second Creek Restoration Project

In 1990, the City of Knoxville established the Water Quality Forum, composed of organizations that monitor and regulate local water quality. In 1992, the Forum identified improving the quality of Knoxville's waterways as a long-term goal and began with one stream, Second Creek, as a pilot project. Nonpoint source pollution, combined with impervious watershed surfaces and few natural streamside buffers, is Second Creek's biggest problem.

In 1994, the Water Quality Forum created the Second Creek Task Force. The Task Force operates with funding and assistance from members of the Water Quality Forum and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Nonpoint Source Program, as well as assistance from the federally-funded Americorps program. The Task Force has three committees: (1) a *technical* committee, which develops strategies to identify water quality problems, monitor stream quality, and develop pollution control projects; (2) a *government* committee, which coordinates agencies involved in Task Force activities, seeks funding, and develops voluntary incentive programs to improve watershed management practices by landowners and businesses along the creek; and (3) an *education* committee, which works to involve citizens in clean-up efforts and, generally, increase citizen awareness and responsibility concerning Second Creek. Members of the three committees include people representing the Water Quality Forum as well as volunteers from the general public. No one from the Second Creek watershed has yet served on the committees.

Currently, the Second Creek Task Force is focusing on restoring segments of riparian zone habitat along Second Creek, stabilizing streambanks, and implementing a project to improve fish and aquatic life habitat. They also are developing methods to further citizen awareness and knowledge of urban water quality issues and to promote Second

Creek's value as a community resource. In addition, they are working on "tech transfer," to take what they learn from Second Creek activities and provide this knowledge to other groups through means such as workshops, manuals, videos, and pamphlets.

The Knoxville Brownfield Pilot Project

In 1992, Knoxville's Department of Economic Development commissioned the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to evaluate the feasibility of a redevelopment effort called the "Center City Business Park." The area studied by TVA comprises 566 acres in the heart of Knoxville. Many different groups, including neighborhood organizations, contributed information and technical assistance and helped refine alternatives for the project. In the course of its study, TVA identified a number of sites with known or probable environmental contamination.

In 1995, EPA selected Knoxville to receive a brownfield pilot project grant: \$200,000 to help conduct an environmental assessment of the Center City Business Park and to plan redevelopment strategies. The project's stated aim is to reestablish the inner city as a vibrant center by joining residents, government agencies, and the private sector in a partnership that is responsive to the needs of the community. Other long-term goals include promoting environmental remediation and attracting new businesses for vacant or abandoned properties. Thus far, since the project's inception, a few firms have located in the project area, but it is not clear whether they have done so because of the pilot project.

The Project 2000 Recycling Program

The Knoxville-based Project 2000 was chartered as a community development corporation in 1980. For nearly 20 years, the organization has sought to address issues that face residents of Knoxville's inner city, particularly those concerning economic development, housing, and youth. Led by Umoja Abdul-Ahad, its founder, Project 2000's endeavors have included acquiring city property for sale to inner city residents; creating the African-American Appalachian Arts Festival, the Kuumba Watoto African Drum and Dance Ensemble, and the Youth Theater Group; attempting to establish a cooperative grocery store; and undertaking a recycling program for Knoxville's public housing neighborhoods. This case study concerned only the recycling program.

In 1991, Project 2000 members conceived the idea of a door-to-door recycling program for Knoxville's public housing neighborhoods. Although Waste Management, Inc. had a city contract to provide curbside recycling for a few Knoxville neighborhoods, public housing complexes were not part of this program. After receiving approval from the

Knoxville Community Development Corporation (KCDC), which oversees the city's public housing activities, Project 2000 initiated its recycling program in one public housing neighborhood, College Homes.

Using a variety of funding sources, particularly a two-year service contract with the city and general assistance funds from KCDC, Project 2000 hired four staff members as educators/organizers. These staff did door-to-door canvassing, asking residents about the quality of life in their neighborhood and whether they would participate in a recycling program. Initially there was some resistance, but according to Project 2000 staff, College Homes residents soon warmed to the idea. By 1993, the program had been enlarged to include seven other public housing complexes in Knoxville.

Project 2000 staff collected paper, glass, plastic, aluminum, and tin each week from the eight public housing complexes. Each had a neighborhood ambassador to the recycling program. The long-term program goal was to have the ambassador from each housing complex take over the collection activities, using financial assistance from the Resident Initiative Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; however, this and other funding never materialized in time and in sufficient amounts. Furthermore, in most of the complexes, none of the ambassadors or other residents aggressively sought funding. In January 1996, when the city did not renew Project 2000's service contract, the organization stopped door-to-door pickup, though it continues to educate residents about recycling and encourages them to use the city-wide drop-off centers.

The "Community" in these Projects

For purposes of the *Second Creek project*, the Task Force defined "the community" as those homes, businesses, and institutions within the Second Creek watershed -- a seven square mile area around the creek. While the watershed lies wholly within Knoxville, in the center of Knox County, several city council districts cut across the watershed's topographical boundaries. In addition, a number of neighborhoods lie wholly or partially within the Second Creek watershed. The creek runs through part of the central business district, under a downtown park, along an edge of the University of Tennessee's Knoxville campus, and into the Tennessee River. The watershed also has areas of heavy industry as well as a state-listed Superfund site. Altogether, the Second Creek community has 40,744 residents, approximately 25 percent of Knoxville's population. According to 1990 census figures, of those living within the watershed, 84% are white and 11% are African-American; the median household income is \$15,164 (well below Knoxville's median of \$19,923 and Knox County's median of \$26,010), with 28% of residents below the 1991 official poverty level; and 65% of the adult residents have only a high school education or less.

For the *brownfield pilot project*, the community is defined as the homes and businesses within and adjacent to the project area. While much of the area consists of highway rights-of-way and commercial or industrial operations, three residential neighborhoods are partly within the Center City Business Park area: Westview, Mechanicsville, and Fort Sanders. These neighborhoods, along with the approximately 280 local businesses in the area, are considered to make up the brownfield project community. The three neighborhoods differ: Westview is predominantly white, with small single-family residences, and has a median household income of \$16,784. Mechanicsville, in contrast, is predominantly African-American and has a median household income of \$9,166, with 38% of its residents below the official poverty level. It too is mainly composed of single-family homes but includes two public housing complexes as well. Fort Sanders, which is adjacent to the University of Tennessee, has a motley mix of large and small turn-of-the-century houses, many now converted into student apartments, contemporary apartment buildings (again, mainly for students), and a sprawling medical complex. Despite these contrasts, the three neighborhoods generally are characterized by higher unemployment rates and lower income levels than many other areas of the city, and one goal of the brownfield project is to provide job opportunities for neighborhood residents.

With the *Project 2000 recycling program*, project leaders concentrated on Knoxville's public housing complexes; thus, it was relatively easy for them to identify the program's "community" and its members. Most of the public housing complexes that were involved in the recycling program are located in North and East Knoxville. Residents of these complexes very low incomes; the average household income is under \$5,500 per year. Six of the eight complexes are predominantly African-American; two are predominantly white. In these complexes, females make up the majority (60% to 70%) of heads of households, and unemployment rates are high in most but not all of the complexes, ranging from a low of 6% in one complex to a high of 91% in another. The definition of the community engaged in the recycling program did change slightly over time: in addition to adding seven complexes following the program's kick-off with College Homes, the program was expanded to include areas adjacent to the complexes or along the routes between the complexes when those residents requested similar recycling services.

Community Involvement in these Projects

The *Second Creek* community has not participated to the extent that the Task Force had hoped. Task Force leaders have tried several different methods to inform and involve the Second Creek community: walking the neighborhood and going to places where people congregate to identify neighborhood organizations; sending out information to landowners in the watershed; holding public meetings to discuss issues of concern as well as educational programs for school, youth, church, and civic groups; and

contacting citizens about events, particularly the periodic creek clean-ups. Task Force leaders believed that by educating community members about water quality problems, Second Creek residents would understand their own impacts, become interested, and participate in the creation and implementation of solutions. Leaders also believed that community buy-in would lead to political leverage, enabling stronger regulations to be designed and executed.

The intensity of involvement has varied over the course of the project but has never been as high as desired. While the definition of the Second Creek community has not changed appreciably, the Task Force leaders have continued to encounter little community interest in creek remediation and little community understanding of individual impacts on the creek. They have come to recognize the need to branch out to all Knoxvilleans for participation in the Second Creek project.

Second Creek project leaders have offered several reasons for the dearth of community involvement in the Second Creek project. First, residents do not consider themselves members of a "Second Creek community." Rather, they see themselves as members of the various neighborhoods that touch the watershed. As such, they may be more concerned with neighborhood issues, not recognizing that they can affect the creek no matter how far from it they dwell. Second, many residents do not accept the fact that they negatively affect the creek through actions taken on their private property. Some property owners believe that since they own their property, they should be able to do what they want with it. Third, many areas within the watershed are poverty-stricken, and residents may not have the time or energy to be actively concerned about the creek. And fourth, one Task Force leader indicated that residents apparently do not believe that the creek is very dirty, but even if they do, they have little hope that it can be substantially improved.

For the *brownfield pilot project*, providing opportunities for community participation was one of EPA's grant requirements. Pursuant to this and to project goals, the Knoxville Department of Economic Development, which has lead responsibility for the project, established a community relations work team to strengthen links between project leaders and the affected neighborhoods. This team meets monthly; members include representatives of groups within Westview, Mechanicsville, and Fort Sanders as well as city officials and local community relations advisors. The three neighborhoods have been involved with redevelopment issues since TVA's feasibility study in 1992 and Knoxville's attempt, in 1994, to acquire an "Empowerment Zone-Enterprise Community" grant for the Center City Business Park area. Project officials also have drawn on the Partnership for Neighborhood Improvement, a local non-profit organization that attempts to develop affordable housing, train neighborhood leaders, and assist small business owners.

Brownfield project officials report new information and plans to neighborhood leaders,

who articulate their visions for their neighborhoods and also relay project information to residents, who respond with their approval or concerns. Neighborhood leaders also have helped project leaders to contact local businesses and stimulate their interest. These interactions have largely been facilitated by community relations team meetings; in addition, neighborhood leaders have led city officials on tours of contaminated or unsightly lots. The total number of neighborhood members involved in the brownfield project has remained roughly the same over the past few years, although one project leader has said that the committees and the availability of information have stimulated participation. For the most part, however, the number of people actively participating has remained at one or two leaders from each neighborhood, with Westview the most actively and passionately involved, Mechanicsville involved to a slightly lesser degree, and very limited participation from Fort Sanders.

As one person commented, there are certain people who routinely participate, so the city always knows whom to contact. Nevertheless, project officials have encountered problems in identifying key neighborhood leaders, especially in Fort Sanders but also in Mechanicsville. In Fort Sanders, with its heterogenous, largely transit population, no one person or group clearly represents the neighborhood, and activism on local issues currently is limited; furthermore, the Fort Sanders neighborhood does not have clearly defined boundaries. In Mechanicsville, community groups proliferate, and city officials have to be certain they contact them all. But Mechanicsville, like Westview, does have fairly clear boundaries as well as active neighborhood groups with a strong sense of local identity.

In the *Project 2000 recycling program*, approximately 30 residents were employed as door-to-door canvassers, neighborhood ambassadors, and recycling pick-up workers, but most residents participated mainly by placing recyclables in pick-up bins and receiving environmental education. Participation was encouraged through a variety of methods: Staff informed residents through presentations at tenant meetings and KCDC meetings, going door-to-door passing out fliers and talking to residents, sending representatives to various neighborhood activities, and appearing on local television programs. In addition, a "recycler of the month" award program was established for each neighborhood. Over the course of the recycling program's five-year lifetime, Project 2000 staff also expanded their education activities to local schools, environmental fairs, and to the formation of the Recycle Rappers, a group of young men who used rap to tell about recycling. While the level of participation in the recycling program and dedication to its ideals varied -- older residents tended to give more support to the program, while younger residents tended to throw everything, including garbage, into the recycling bins -- residents gradually became more dedicated to recycling. Until the final year of the program, participation rates increased, averaging at least 65% in the eight public housing complexes.

In the final year or so of the program, participation dropped off somewhat. This

decrease was due partly to problems that had arisen in some complexes with the recycling bins: Some complex managers wanted residents to keep their bins indoors, but many residents refused and stopped recycling. It was also due partly to the threat of program termination: When the service contract with the city expired, excitement diminished. If the city contract had been extended, if Project 2000 had been consistently able to sell its recyclables for revenue, or if residents had taken over the program with the help of the HUD grants, then the recycling program might have become self-sustaining. But none of these occurred.

Assessment of the Nature of Community and Community Involvement in these Projects

In each of these three projects, creating or strengthening a community was not the primary goal; instead, the aim was to draw upon and build a spirit of community in order to promote involvement in the project. In effect, the social attributes of community (social interaction, common ties, mutual satisfaction of needs) were to be invoked in service to the project, although ultimately, the project was to be in service to the community as well. In each of these cases, project leaders were faced with a challenging task.

None of the projects could define its community according to networks of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs that had developed organically over time. Instead, each project had to **construct** a community piecemeal out of fragments of other communities that already existed, and to create social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs where it had not previously existed -- perhaps at all and certainly not around the mission of the project. The Project 2000 recycling program was faced with the easiest task in this regard, because (1) it had the least need to fashion one community out of several pre-existing communities, and (2) the complexes with which it was dealing had shared characteristics that could provide the basis for a sense of connection with each other. Nevertheless, the Project 2000 recycling program leaders, like the leaders of the other projects, had to convince people that their particular project mission was important to individual and community well-being.

The *Second Creek project* has sought to coalesce a new community around a particular issue -- water quality in the creek -- that required not only passive community support but tangible community action. Despite earnest and varied efforts, it has not succeeded in sparking extensive community action thus far within the Second Creek area, although it has drawn attention city-wide attention to the area and to Knoxville's other creeks. The *brownfield pilot project* has sought to bring together existing neighborhoods and businesses around a new city-fostered enterprise -- that of revitalizing a decaying

urban area. Most of the action was to be taken by city officials, working in concert with state officials, investors, businesses, etc. The support of community members has been sought, but so far, their active engagement has not been essential to the project, nor has it been forthcoming from anyone except a few neighborhood leaders. The *Project 2000 recycling program* had a dual mission. Its immediate goal was to conduct a recycling program in eight public housing complexes, and it succeeded in this goal as long as it had funding: Recycling participation rates were high. Its longer term goal, however, was to spawn a self-sustaining, environmentally beneficial economic development opportunity in the public housing complexes, but it was unable to realize this goal, due both to funding problems and to insufficient initiative on the part of public housing complex residents.

Because each of these three projects is different, as are all community-based environmental protection efforts, none can offer a formula for how community can be created around a project mission. There are, however, lessons that can be drawn from these three cases:

- Shared territory is not enough to make people feel they are part of a community; the key attributes of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs must also be present or must be developed. These can take time to develop; they cannot be developed in all cases; and, if developed, they may be difficult to sustain.
- A very large investment of time, effort, and creativity is often required to get even modest payoffs in terms of community involvement in a particular project.
- Active participation by a *large* number of people, especially if it necessitates their investing a great deal of effort or giving up existing customs, is especially difficult to achieve.
- Using a tiered approach of working closely with neighborhood leaders who in turn work with their neighborhoods can be effective, especially if community opinion rather than community action is mainly what is sought. Paradoxically, however, relying on community leaders to convey opinion can be especially risky: while community actions speak for themselves, community opinions do not.

Hard Questions

This project has raised more questions than it has answered. Some of these questions were identified early in the project, as a result of thoughts triggered by the literature review, and they helped to shape the nature of our interviews and case studies. Nevertheless, most of these questions do not have definitive answers. Instead, they remain areas for further thought and research.

These hard questions are grouped below into four clusters:

- essential attributes of a community
- community boundaries and/or membership
- changes in a community over time
- issue-based communities

Essential Attributes of a Community

While the attributes of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs are mentioned, explicitly or indirectly, by a number of scholars as key attributes of community, they are not universally endorsed as together constituting a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for community. Furthermore, scholars disagree about whether a fourth attribute -- shared territory -- is a necessary condition for community, and about the extent to which it is also a sufficient condition.

Apart from these uncertainties, however, questions also arise about what is meant by each of these attributes -- both about what they are, exactly, and about how strong they must be. Some key related questions are as follows:

Shared territory. As we become more mobile, it becomes harder for each of us to specify exactly where our "community" is. Is it the neighborhood where we live? ... shop? ... work? ... recreate? ... worship? As these neighborhoods become less coterminous, our individual mental pictures of the physical and non-physical aspects of our community become more blurred and complex. And, as these individual pictures become more complex, so too does the composite picture. The disparity between the trait of shared territory and other key traits of community is likely to grow, making it increasingly difficult to match a particular place with a particular community. Should shared territory then be discarded as a key attribute of community? Furthermore, as the notion of community becomes disconnected from shared territory and as the number of communities to which we each belong grows, does the robustness of community dwindle?

Social interaction. As suggested above, patterns of social interaction are becoming

more complex and less spatially determined as society becomes more urbanized and more globally connected through faster, cheaper, more convenient modes of transportation and communication. One result is that some people may live as virtual hermits within their residential neighborhoods: They may have very few social interactions with others living near by. Can they then be counted as members of that residential community? And if they can, must other requisite features of community, such as shared historical ties, be all the stronger for them?

Common ties. Communities are rarely homogeneous. Some members may not share many of the values, beliefs, etc. held by other community members and may feel ambivalent about being part of the community -- an alienation captured in country and western songs by lines like "I'm not from here, I just live here ..." Others may wish to be part of the community but may be rejected because of their race, age, religion, or ethnic background. Are both types of people then simply interlopers, people who are in but not of the community? And if so, should the community be seen as a Swiss-cheese map, populated only by like-minded members with all others excluded? Probably not, unless we are prepared to relegate the notion of community to either the past or an unattainable ideal. Otherwise, we must accept pluralism as well as affinity as typical of many communities today.

Nevertheless, it appears that *some* common ties, be they weak or latent, are needed for a group to count as a community and for a person to count as a member of that community. What minimum level of ties is essential for a community to continue to qualify as a community and an individual as a community member?

Mutual satisfaction of needs. Mutual satisfaction of material needs traditionally was tied to shared territory and the physical characteristics of the community -- for example, by sharing farming or fishing equipment; satisfaction of intellectual and emotional needs, to social interaction and common ties. Often, these were bound together, however: mutually satisfying material needs (e.g., through a barn-raising) was also an opportunity for interacting socially and deepening common ties. Today, satisfaction of material needs is more likely to take place within workplace and commercial settings that may offer few opportunities for also satisfying intellectual and emotional needs. Although people today seek and find other resources to satisfy the latter type of needs, these resources are more likely to be unique to each individual; they are less likely to be part of a shared fabric. Under these conditions, what role does mutual satisfaction of needs continue to play as an attribute of community?

Community Boundaries and Membership

Related to the question of a community's essential attributes are several other hard questions. One set has to do with spatial dimensions and membership. Despite the difficulty of arriving at clear inclusion/exclusion rules for defining community boundaries and community members, these issues are likely to remain important, especially for some public policy programs.

It's fairly clear that delineating a community by using boundaries borrowed from census tracts, zip codes, political jurisdictions, etc. often doesn't work. These rarely have much in common with the key attributes of community. Ecological boundaries may more closely approximate the physical boundaries of some human communities, but they may not, especially in areas where built features (e.g., roads) are far more dominant than natural features (e.g., streams). The boundaries of large ecosystems (e.g., a major watershed) are also likely to include a number of communities, not just one.

What methods should be used for identifying the spatial boundaries of a community? Self-definitional methods using techniques such as cognitive mapping are more reliable than borrowed boundaries, but they too have their problems. In addition to the difficulty of identifying community members and then engaging their attention, cognitive mapping is likely to be impractical in many instances: for example, if time is short, the community is large, or if several communities need to be identified. In addition, a process that emphasizes cognitive mapping will be most helpful for identifying the "shared territory" attribute of community but not necessarily its other attributes.

Even if a mapping process includes questions about who should be included as community members, it is not likely to fully resolve this key issue ... especially if people not only in but also outside the spatially-defined community potentially should be counted as members because of their strong ties and interaction with the community. This leads to the question: With a spatially-defined community, must all its members live within the community, and are all people within the spatially-defined area members of the community? A related question is: Are there degrees of membership in a community, and if so, how (and by whom) should these degrees be determined?

Changes in a Community over Time

The temporal dimensions of a community further complicate the picture. The idea that communities may be latent, dormant, or moribund during some periods while vibrant during others suggests that the key attributes of community discussed above must be considered, not only as an actuality, but as a potential. In other words, one must assess

not only whether social interaction, common ties, etc. currently exist but whether they could be fanned into life, and if so, by what (or by whom). This assessment of possibilities is, for all practical purposes, virtually impossible to make, especially given that the spatial and human dimensions of the community are dynamic. People move in and out; people get old and die. Businesses come and go; so also do even seemingly permanent fixtures such as schools and churches. The temporal dimensions of community can serve as a reminder that what may seem static is in fact fluid. Yet how can that fluidity be captured, except in retrospect?

Issue-Based Communities

Related to the idea of changes in a community is the notion that a community can be created or revitalized because of a single issue or set of issues. This notion is of particular relevance to community-based environmental protection: the relevant communities will in some instances be issue-based; that is, they may consist of people who come together at least in part because of a particular issue related to their local environment, with the issue serving as the catalyst for community-building. There are, however, three qualifications to this.

First, although people may interact on an environmental issue, they do not necessarily constitute a community, in any strong sense of that term: they may come from different parts of the county, interact only on a limited basis, and hold radically different views. Second, issue-based communities are likely to be ephemeral unless other bonds develop to reinforce the interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs resulting from coalescence around the issue. And third, forward-thinking community-based environmental protection is intended to get beyond a crisis mentality -- i.e., beyond a narrow focus on isolated, contentious issues -- and move towards defining proactively an integrated approach to environmental protection over the longer term; it thus may require a pre-existing community rather than expecting that the "issue" of community-based environmental protection will itself serve as a catalyst for community.

However, if the communities important to community-based environmental protection are *not* mainly issue-based, then their existence must precede and be largely independent of the environmental issue at hand. In this case, to count as a community, the members likely will have lived or worked in the same territory, interacted with each other as individuals and through organizations, shared one or more ties, and satisfied at least some of each others' needs. Again, however, a qualification is needed. All of these traits may not exist: Can it then be said that there simply is no viable community? And if so, should the idea of "community-based environmental protection" be abandoned? An intermediate position might be to allow for the possibility of latent communities -- for example, a group in a geographic area with the

common tie of shared culture. An environmental issue may then precipitate or extend social interactions which will build on other existing but hitherto inactive traits of community.

Conclusion: A Tentative Set of Working Principles

With all the caveats mentioned in the preceding section, is there anything concrete that can be said about community and then translated into a useful guideline for environmental protection activities at the local level? There's not much, but there's a little, stated below as working principles. They are based on our own thoughts, drawing upon what we learned through the literature review, interviews, and case studies conducted as part of this research project.

First, for the purposes of community-based environmental protection, a community usually must have a spatial dimension. That spatial dimension does not need to coincide with the boundaries of the environmental issue(s) at hand, but an awareness of those boundaries is needed when considering this spatial dimension.

Second, the spatial dimension of a community is fluid (as is the human dimension), yet it is not featureless. Its boundaries may never be fully clear, but its key internal features should be widely agreed upon.

Third, shared territory is not enough to constitute a community; the key attributes of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs also must be present or must be fostered. This can take time and may not be possible in all cases, especially if the spatially-defined community has little relationship to existing social networks.

Fourth, simply residing in a spatially-defined community is not enough to make one a community member, nor is it necessary to reside in the community to be part of it. Instead, one must engage in and exhibit a concern for the shared life of the community, including but not limited to aspects that coincide with one's own interests. The longer and more steadfastly one has done so, the more one is a member of the community. The stronger one's social interactions, common ties, and interdependence with the community, the more one is a part of it. Whether one is a member of a community is not a yes/no question, it is a question of degree.

Fifth, unanimity of values, norms, and beliefs are not necessary for a group to be called a community (nor are similarities of race, age, religion, or ethnic background). But members of the community must share a common concern for the welfare of the community, even if they do not agree on how that should best be promoted.

Sixth, communities can exist as a possibility, but communities that coalesce around a single issue are likely to be short-lived unless the key attributes of social interaction, common ties, and mutual satisfaction of needs are reinforced over time. Recently hatched single-issue communities should not be assumed to obliterate long-standing communities.

Seventh, communities inevitably change over time in their human and physical make-ups. For community-based environmental protection, this means that any major new initiative requires at least a quick assessment of the current make-up of the relevant community(ies).

Eighth, community involvement can be difficult to promote, especially on issues that do not captivate a community's attention. A large investment of time, effort, and creativity may be required to get even a few people involved in a sustained fashion.

Ninth, active participation by a *large* number of people should not be expected, especially if it necessitates their investing a great deal of effort or giving up existing customs and practices.

Tenth, especially in large areas where the spatially-defined community is not reinforced with strong social networks, working closely with leaders of pre-existing communities can be an efficient way to learn about community views. It is risky, however, since those leaders may not fully reflect their communities' views, and it will not necessarily lead to wide-scale community action.

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