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Cover memo for: *Distilling Deliberation:*
The Production of Commonality in Philadelphia's Zoning Reform Project

Hello everyone,

Thank you so much for taking a look at the attached paper. I'm delighted to be back in the workshop setting, and I regret that I'm co-running a different workshop at Rutgers on Thursday afternoons, which prevents me from coming into the city regularly to take part in the discussion.

This project is very much in its embryonic stage, so I'm eager for your input on how to go forward with this seed paper (which is really an exploratory research memo). Let me give you a bit of background on the project, as well as an account of how our thinking has developed since David Gibson and I wrote the attached paper last spring. In January 2010, David and I were invited to take part as academic researchers in a series of deliberative forums sponsored by the Penn Project for Civic Engagement (PPCE). The PPCE is a program housed at Penn that has designed and administered a long series of public deliberative forums in the Philadelphia region since the 1990s, on such topics as congressional and local elections, budget processes, waterfront development, arts policies, green space, health care reform and other issues. Often these forums have been carried out in partnership with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the local public radio station WHYY. This time the PPCE, WHYY and the local branch of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) facilitated a series of meetings between developers and civic organizations to discuss the proposed reform of the city's Zoning Code. These discussions, labeled *Common Ground for Building our City,* are described in more detail in the paper below.

One interesting question is why the organizers were interested in having academics accompanying these forums in the first place. David and I had several meetings with PPCE director Harris Sokoloff, who first approached David (a faculty member in the Penn sociology department) due to his work on conversational dynamics in small groups. I came on board because I thought it was an interesting extension of my work on styles of political communication, as developed in my book, *Partisan Publics.* While Sokoloff was eager to have us "do research," and was very accommodating to our data collection plans, he didn't seem particularly interested in what exactly we did with the data. His passion for the project (and for the work of PPCE in general) seems to be as a form of public intervention; yet since he is housed in a university, he told us that it is important to ensuring continued support from Penn that the project have some kind of academic significance (interestingly, the current President of Penn is deliberative theorist Amy Guttman). At these forums, PPCE regularly collects "before" and "after" surveys, but as far as I can tell they have done very little with the data from past events, and as we noted, the surveys themselves were collected in a haphazard way as a kind of tag-on evaluation at the end as everyone was rushing out the door. We changed a couple of the questions on the survey for this event, and we have them in hand to analyze, but we're dubious about the quality of the survey data.

We're much more excited about the other data that we were able to collect. We were able to do digital audio recordings of small and large group discussions at the three events, the first involving members of the development community (developers, architects, planners), the second involving local community group leaders, and the third "consolidation" meeting combining both developers and civic leaders. Each set of groups engaged in a series of discussions about values, experiences and principles, aimed at finding common ground on proposals for reform of the public input process into zoning decisions (described in the paper). While the quality of the recordings is not perfect, given the sometimes tumultuous recording conditions, they are surprisingly audible and give us a lot to work with. We also collected photos of most of the poster-board annotations carried out by the facilitators during the discussions, as well as the array of documents produced before and after the meetings by the organizers and facilitators. In addition, we've downloaded documents and reports from a number of websites that have been keeping track of the PPCE *Common Ground* project as well as the Philadelphia Zoning Reform Process more generally.

Our initial starting point has been to examine these deliberations as a process of "distillation" of a set of abstract "principles" (presented as a contribution to the discussions and decisions of the Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission) out of a richly complex, contentious, contradictory and tension-filled set of experiences, stories and conversations. Such distillation is necessary on cognitive, pragmatic, and political grounds. Both the sense-making process and the transition from cognition to action depend on the reduction of complexity, which can otherwise be overwhelming, distracting, and paralyzing. Rich storytelling can be emotionally and interactionally satisfying, but doesn't translate directly into personal or political action models or policy proposals. This is particularly the case when the goal of the discussion is to offer suggestions for changes and improvements in institutionalized routines of action, experienced by everyone involved as sub-optimal (although for different reasons). Distillation is essential to extracting any kind of workable proposals from the rich stream of stories and suggestions.

And yet, this raises the question of what is left out or suppressed in the process by which experiences are recounted as "stories," from which are extracted "lessons," which are further distilled into "principles" proposing to guide a self-conscious political change process. This question is particularly urgent given that there are real stakes involved as well as strong differences in interests, power, and resources. As the paper describes, particular attention must be paid to the role of moderators, as well as to the dynamics of the deliberative process itself – both the ways in which this process is formally designed and facilitated by the organizers, and the ways in which participants often push back against these procedures, constraints and channeling attempts. We need to examine what kinds of voices and interventions are invited, cultivated and taken forward in the extraction process and which ones get filtered out, suppressed and left behind – either consciously or unconsciously – by the various layers of intermediation and decision-making involved in the movement from stories to principles to policies. Moreover, there's a possibility that nothing at all useful or challenging may be left at the end of the consensus-building process, beyond a collection of flat, clawless truisms (commonality as cliché). The attached paper elaborates on our initial thinking about these questions.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended a mini-conference at NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge on "Democratizing Inequalities," which raised a number of additional questions for me. I'd like your input on which aspects of these seem worthwhile to pursue. A link to the conference webpage can be found here:
http://www.uvm.edu/~ewalker/DI/Democratizing_Inequalitites/Home.html

I learned at this conference (in papers by Caroline Lee, Ed Walker, Michael McQuarrie, Isaac Martin and others) that the PPCE is not an isolated deliberative endeavor, but rather exists as part of a much larger field of what Lee calls the public deliberation "industry." This includes not only non-profit and university-based organizations such as the PPCE, but also a range of other public and private sector consulting organizations that design and facilitate deliberative forums for a range of government, corporate, and non-profit clients. Sometimes these serve as a kind of market research vehicle for government and corporate actors, while at other times they appear to be an attempt to gain community "buy-in" from stakeholders, taxpayers or consumers and to tame and channel potential opposition. (In a couple of memorable quotes from Lee's paper, they aim to produce "more feathers with less squawking" and "inspire action for change without resistance.")

Despite this potentially cynical reading of the intention and effects of such forms of public consultation, Lee notes that the practitioners themselves – the consulting organizations that design such forums as well as the facilitators and moderators who do the hands-on work – often have a quite earnest and even quasi-spiritual sense of their own mission. This is frequently framed in terms of anti-commercialism, "civilizing" capitalism, "transforming" ossified bureaucratic and hierarchical practices, and empowering "authentic" citizen participation in the democratic process. (In the forums we observed, other ambiguously resonant goals included increasing "transparency" and producing "a level playing field.")

So this raises the question of whether this recent proliferation of deliberative forums (in what has been called the "Great Consultation") represents "deepening democracy" and the potential for challenge and resistance from below, or new forms of "governmentality" and social self-regulation that support the interests of those positioned above. Probably it is some combination of both – although the ways in which this plays out in practice needs to be mapped out empirically.

Our data on the *Common Ground* deliberations provide an excellent opportunity to unpack these questions. Quite possibly they present a kind of "best case" for teasing out these contradictory tendencies: they were carried out by a non-profit, academically-embedded deliberative democracy outfit; they involve powerfully contending interests among government, corporate, and community actors; they are bravely (and non-cynically) inspired by the goal of finding some kind of commonality of value and principle among these contending interests; and yet they are subject to all of the distillation and filtering processes described above. What is going on here on the ground? And what does it have to say about both the promise and limitations of public deliberation?

In addition to this memo I'm including several different kinds of supporting materials to inform our discussion, to give you a sense of the rich layeredness of the data. The documents in the

accompanying pdf file include 1) photos of some of the posters on which facilitators recorded their notes during the meetings; 2) an example of a moderator's report from one of the civic leadership groups; 3) an excerpt from the final report on "Common Ground Principles" produced by PPCE and presented to the Zoning Code Commission (ZCC); 4) the ZCC's official response to the PPCE report, as recorded in the minutes of one of their meetings; and 5) a description of the ZCC's draft changes in the public review process, taken from their current "online town meeting," which shows the degree to which the suggestions of the *Common Ground* deliberations have resulted in policy recommendations. The ZCC's proposed revision of the Zoning Code will be presented to the Philadelphia City Council later this fall for an up or down vote.

Since this project is at such an early stage, we're looking for any and all suggestions – on theoretical framing, related research and literatures, data analysis strategies, potential pitfalls, promising pathways, etc. I'm very much looking forward to the discussion!

Ann

Here are a several relevant websites that you might want to check out:

The Penn Project for Civic Engagement:
http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pcel/programs/ppce/

A description of the PPCE *Common Ground for Building our City* project
http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pcel/programs/ppce/code

The Final Report from the *Common Ground* deliberations, presented to the Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission:
http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/pcel/PennCommonGroundsFINAL.pdf

The website of the Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission:
http://www.zoningmatters.org/

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Distilling Deliberation

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Deliberative democracy refers to the process whereby citizens and/or their elected representatives deliberate about divisive issues with the objective of identifying policies that everyone can abide by though everyone's interests might not be equally served by them. Intellectually, the notion is frequently traced to Habermas, whose "ideal speech situation" ensures that everyone is equally entitled to speak, and that the position prevails which is best justified according to ethical and epistemological standards that everyone assents to. (Also important is Rawls's conceit of people deciding upon the constitution of society from behind the "veil of ignorance" in which they lack knowledge of what their particular positions and interests in that society will be.) Guttman and Thompson have elaborated upon this idea, stressing the importance of "reciprocity," by which they mean that each party makes arguments that they believe that the other will find acceptable, as consistent with those shared standards.

A problem with most work on deliberative democracy is that it better elaborated on a theoretical level--vis-a-vis debates within political theory (Guttman and Thompson)--than in terms of the mechanics of organizing deliberatively democratic systems, in terms of who gets recognized as a participant and how deliberation is structured. (Exceptions can be found in Gastil and Levine [2005].) Partly this is because Guttman and Thompson imagine deliberation happening in various settings and at various levels--between citizens, between policymakers, and between citizens and policymakers--so that the details aren't as important as the fact that, in one way or another, through whatever mechanism, and over whatever time period, deliberation occurs. Relatedly, there has been little research on how deliberative democracy actually works "on the ground," in the sense of studying the conversational exchanges that occur when people attempt to "do" deliberative democracy, or in the sense of how the products of deliberation are identified, synthesized, and (perhaps through several intermediate steps) translated into decisions.

The contributors to Fung and Wright's *Deepening Democracy* are an exception. Analyzing cases such as neighborhood governance counsels in Chicago and the participatory budget counsels of Porto Alegre, Brazil, the authors describe the institutional arrangements surrounding such assemblies and the concrete mechanisms by which they impact policy-making (largely by being a formal component of the latter). The chapters are empirically sketchy,

however, and insufficiently critical, perhaps because insufficiently empirical. For instance, while the authors present data on who participated in these discussions and allude to ethnographic observations, no examples of such discussions are quoted and analyzed, such as in the manner of Mansbridge (1980), Gamson (1992), and Perrin (2006).

One practical challenge, already mentioned, is turning deliberations into concrete recommendations. One problem is that people might not reach a conclusion in any reasonable amount of time, particularly if they interpret "conclusion" to mean complete consensus. Another is that if people are permitted to vote on recommendations, they may quickly revert to their parochial interests, the hours just spent forging consensus notwithstanding.

One solution to both problems is to follow the National Issues Forum format. This has been used extensively within the U.S. over the past thirty years, and involves, along with other things, a moderator who not only encourages participation and civility, but also extracts "common ground" principles that can subsequently be cast as the group's "conclusions" (Melville et al.). These are then communicated to policymakers, usually after the principles produced by several (or many) groups are reconciled and synthesized.

Advocates of this approach perceive moderators as the answer to some vexing problems, but as with deliberative democracy in general, the role of the moderator has been subject to little or no careful empirical analysis. This is in spite of the fact that the moderator's role is arguably one of benevolent meddling, since he or she has to select points of plausible consensus from the welter of talk that could go on indefinitely. Further, when multiple groups are involved, someone has to synthesize and reconcile those points when those group arrive at different conclusions, and articulate them for power-holders. That too has gone unstudied.

This is a study of the institutional, discursive and conversational dynamics involved the process of extracting, distilling, reconciling and synthesizing the deliberations and recommendations of deliberative democracy groups.

Background on the Common Ground deliberations

The data from this paper come from a series of meetings in January 2010 between Philadelphia-area developers and neighborhood-based civic associations, organized by the Penn Project for Civic Engagement (and co-sponsored by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the public radio station WHYY). This project, entitled "Common Ground for Building our City: Developers, the Public and the Zoning Code" was designed to forge some common understanding between two groups that are often engaged in antagonistic relations--developers and neighborhood activists. The goal was to come up with a set of joint principles and recommendations for the revision of the city's Zoning Code, which is currently underway. The specific focus of the discussions was *the role of public input in the project review process* for new development in the city. (This narrow focus is important, as we will explain below. They weren't offering recommendations on the revised zoning code regulations themselves, but rather on *procedures for public input* on development projects -- including the critical question of when public review should be triggered).

A bit more background is important to understand these deliberations. First, this is the latest in a long series of deliberative forums organized by the Penn Project for Civic Engagement (often in partnership with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* or the public radio station WHYY). These began in 1996 with a series of community forums (called "Citizen Voices") around congressional debates, followed up by similar forums related to Mayoral, Gubernatorial and Senate races in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. (One of these is described by Charles, Sokoloff, and Satullo [2005].) In the past five years, projects have included 2006-07 community forums on the development of the Philadelphia Waterfront (with 5,000 participants), a series of 2006-08 forums discussing the future of city in preparation for the mayoral elections (known as "Great Expectations," with 2,500 participants), a 2008 forum on arts and culture ("The Big Canvas," with 500 participants) and a 2009 forum on the Mayor's proposed budget cuts ("Tough Times, Tough Choices," with 1,700 participants). This prior history is important, as members of the leadership team (in particular Harris Sokoloff of PPCE and Chris Satullo of WHYY) have had extensive experience in the organization and facilitation of these kinds of deliberative forums. Moreover, most of the trained moderators at Common Ground had experience in leading discussion groups at one or more of these previous events.

What distinguished the Common Ground deliberations from many of these previous forums was the attempt to select stakeholders from both sides of a polarizing public issue and come up with shared principles and recommendations (as well as an account of tensions, tradeoffs, and proposed resolutions). As Sokoloff described it to us, the goal was to move from "positions" to "interests" to "values" and thus to the elaboration of shared principles on which to base the reform of the zoning code. This search for common ground was carried out in a situation in which people potentially had a lot to gain or lose from the results, which is different from the exploratory "express your hopes" character of some of the previous PPCE forums. As Ann observed to Sokoloff, this was a very brave endeavor, and touches on all of the most challenging issues involved in deliberative democracy.

Again, the context for these meetings is Philadelphia's current effort to reform its zoning code. All parties to the conversation agree that the city's current zoning code is hopelessly outdated; it has not been revised since 1960--though it allegedly sports 1,000 patchwork fixes--while the city itself has gone through enormous changes in neighborhood structure and development needs. As a result, most new building projects (or changes to current structures) need to apply for "variances" or "overlays" to the zoning code (as opposed to being able to build "as of right," that is, according to code guidelines). Proposed variances need to go before the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) for approval, and these ZBA hearings are open to those who have an immediate interest in the building project, including planners, architects and developers (and their lawyers) as well as local residents and neighborhood groups affected by the development project.

The question of who, exactly, constitutes a neighborhood group -- and thus, who has "standing" before the ZBA -- is a critical question that occupied a lot of space in the discussions. Right now these ZBA hearings are basically the only opportunity local community members have to provide input into building projects that affect their neighborhood -- and thus are often the site of contentious disputes between developers and community members. The more organized communities (aided by lawyers and other resources) are quite skilled in using these

hearings to block unwanted development, while those in less resourced and organized communities often feel steamrolled and ignored by developers. On top of that, local councilmembers have de facto veto power over all building in their districts (known as “councilmanic privilege»), complicating the backstage political process of gaining approval for building projects. In general, developers see the time, work, and money that go into arguing the case before the ZBA, forging bonds with community groups, and gaining the support of local councilmembers as a huge drain on their resources that discourages investment in the city. On the other hand, local community groups see the ZBA hearings as their only point of leverage in relation to what gets built in their neighborhoods.

In 2008, 80% of Philadephia voters approved a ballot measure calling for the creation of a "Zoning Code Commission" (ZCC) to reform and modernize the zoning code. [However, as Chris Satullo (from WHYY) told the moderators at a training session Ann attended, 40% of the voters thought it should be reformed in one way, while 40% thought it should should be reformed the opposite way.] Over the past year, the ZCC has held a series meetings to discuss changes to the code, all of which have been open to the public. (Minutes of these meetings are available online.) They have nearly completed their recommendations, and in fall 2009 released a preliminary draft of a proposal. But this was hardly received warmly, with some civic groups, in particular, complaining that some of their existing leverage over the project review process would be lost in the new plan. Right now, most of the ZCC's proposal has been completed; the outstanding issue, which has proved both interesting and hard to resolve, is what role the public plays in decisions over development projects. Issues include:

- what should trigger public review of development projects (e.g., all development, only those requiring variances, large projects, those with "high impact," those meeting community opposition, etc.)

- what should be the timing of the review process? (i.e, what counts as "timely notification" for the community; what should be the timeline for response, at what stage in the planning process should the public be consulted?)

-who counts as "speaking for the neighborhood" (i.e., who has "standing" to participate in the review? immediate neighbors? established civic groups? citywide groups? any group of concerned residents and/or citizens? A common experience described by developers is getting the okay from one group only to run into opposition from another subsequently.)

-what role should elected council members play in the process (i.e, should they retain their current veto power, known as "councilmanic privilege"?)

-in which aspects of development should the public have a say (e.g., with relation to design, aesthetics, size, impact, environmental issues, etc.)

Given the public outcry -- and with hopes of gaining some public and political buy-in to their proposal -- the ZCC agreed to work with the Penn Project for Civic Engagement (PPCE) on a series of forums between developers and civic organizations to discuss these issues (described below). While these meetings are purely advisory (more of a sounding board than anythinge

else), the ZCC has agreed to respond in writing point by point to the proposals generated by the three meetings, giving reasons as to why these recomendations are or are not included in their final proposal. Sokoloff described this promise "to respond" as a significant concession, as it can be difficult to extract any official response from public officials. Many ZCC members (who consist mostly of planners, architects, council members, business reps and some appointed community reps) attended the three January meetings and listened avidly to the discussions. Despite the lack of any binding authority, the forums were considered a "hot ticket" by both developers and civic groups, and the PPCE had to turn many people away.

The composition and design of the deliberative events

The Common Ground advisory board met several times in December and January to talk about the invitee lists. They had to come up with two quickly: one consisting of developers (and others like architects and some lawyers) who have dealt with the ZBA, and one consisting of representatives of civic associations. The board decided on some ground rules early on: no organization would be permitted to send more than one representative, and no city-wide civic organizations would be invited--only neighborhood-based ones. In terms of this second rule, however, everyone knew that because of the cross-cutting nature of group memberships, there were neighborhood-based activists who also belonged to larger organizations, and the consensus was that such people would be permitted to come but informed to speak on behalf of their more local affiliation.

One complication was that Community Development Corporations, or CDCs, fall between neighborhood associations and developers, working with the latter (and also dealing with the ZBA) on behalf of the former. it was decided that these organizations would be permitted to send a representative to each of the first two meetings.

The Common Ground forums occurred on three different days, and targeted different groups of people. On Tuesday, January 19th, the **developers** met from 11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in Philadelphia's exclusive Union League, where they were served a sit-down lunch. (To the chagrin of the advisory board, two architects were turned away for showing up in jeans.) On Saturday, January 23rd, the **civic representatives** met from 9:00 to 3:00 at Temple University, where they were served donuts and boxed lunches. (Naturally they eventually caught wind of the disparity in location and food and some complained.) And then, on Wednesday January 27th, **representatives of both sides**--self-selected from the first two meetings--met together in a "consolidation meeting" at the Arch Street Friends Meeting House, to a self-served buffet, home-style cooking (with a vegan option). This meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted until 9:30.

Each meeting started with introductory remarks by the forum organizers. Then the large group broke up into smaller groups of 10-15, each with two moderators. Sometimes these groups broke up into smaller-yet groups, each with one moderator. With some variation, at the end of each meeting everyone reassembled and offered their conclusions to Sokoloff, who attempted--not very successfully given how little time remained--to synthesize their recommendations on the fly.

In order to pry the participants loose from their pre-established positions -- and encourage listening and dialogue -- the first two meetings were organized around the sharing of stories. Groups of developers (at the first meeting) and community organizations (at the second) were asked to share stories of when the project review process went well, and when it went badly. The moderators encouraged participants to find connections between stories and extract general principles about what constitutes (or impedes) an effective review process. Moderators took running notes on the stories on flip charts and then tried to boil those down to more general principles on additional flip chart pages that were posted around the room. These were later reported by the moderators to the entire group. After a round of story-telling (and principle-extracting), one of the organizers (an architect) shared alternative models for project review from Chicago, New York, and Boston. Participants then returned to their groups and were asked to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of these other models in relation to their own experiences, and to work at further honing and distillation of general principles.

At the second meeting of civic associations, one additional phase of discussion took place before the story-telling exchange. In small groups, participants were asked to share their thoughts about what they value about their neighborhoods. The idea here was that since these groups were expected to be more heterogeneous than the developers in terms of background and interests, and more locked into (potentially antagonistic) positions, they should start by finding points of commonality at the level of neighborhood values and interests before getting into the specifics about the zoning process. (Again the focus was to tunnel beyond particularistic "positions" to shared interests and values.)

At the third "consolidation meeting" with both developers and civic associations, the task was somewhat different. Four groups of about 10-15 each were asked to see if they could find common ground on a series of tough issues emerging from the prior two meetings. These topics were divided into what organizers called "low hanging fruit" (i.e., issues that the organizers thought would be relatively easy to find commonality on) and "gut wrenchers" (i.e., issues that involved strong tensions and disagreements). Each group was given 15 minutes to address one low hanging fruit question, and about 35 minutes each for two gut wrenchers (although frequently the low hanging fruit proved just as challenging to resolve as the gut wrencher, while the gut wrenchers didn't always stir strong passions). At the end the groups came together and the moderators reported on whatever common "principles" and proposed "actions" they were able to formulate, as well as continuing areas of tension and disagreement. These were later recorded by the moderators in written reports and will be synthesized by the organizers into a final set of principles and suggestions to be submitted to the ZCC.

Data

Several types of data were collected.

1. ***Surveys***. Post-forum surveys were administered to all participants, with questions about their experiences in, and impressions of, their groups, and basic demographics. Response rate was about 50%.

2. ***Audio recordings***. All groups consented to being digitally recorded. (One group turned off the recorders when something especially delicate--councilmanic privileges--were being discussed.) Audio quality varies according to the amount of background noise (in particular, from other groups) and the location of the recorders, but in general seems to range from adequate to very good.

3. ***Moderator notes***. We have photographs of most of the notes taken by moderators (on a big pad of paper on an easel) during the sessions, and the typed versions of the main recommendations (values/principles) they produced subsequently. We also will have the final recommendations delivered to the ZCC and will eventually have their official response.

4. ***Interviews*** (potentially). It wouldn't be hard for us to do some interviews with members of the advisory board and/or forum participants.

General observations

Though communicative action in Habermas seems like something that can only exist for 1/10 of a second under perfect conditions, like some exotic particle, it was surprisingly easy to cajole people into the language game of deliberative democracy, where you make claims that advance your interests insofar as they can be justified by appealing to standards that you expect the other side to agree to. But talk frequently ran aground of the fact that participants were talking about the ideal forms of public input into a zoning process the basic parameters of which--what can be built where "of right" and under what conditions--have yet to be determined. (Ironically, this made it more like Rawls's original position, because they were essentially being asked to deliberate the rules of a game the starting configuration of which was not on the agenda.) This was a problem because neighborhood representatives would of course want wider discretion to review and contest development pursuant to a code which favored their interests than one which did not. Consequently, participants often tried to make conditional formulations ("if it's a good code...") that the moderators resisted.

In addition, there was a tension in the process between engaging with live, nitty-gritty stories and examples and trying to turn these into useful principles (grounded in common values) that could apply to a large number of cases. As the process of extraction, abstraction, and distillation occurred, there was a strong tendency for recommendations to become increasingly vague, flat and and cliched, lacking in dramatic tension or analytical punch. This raises the question of whether this flattening effect is a necessary result of the distillation process. While it may be possible to distill while retaining punch (as with strong whiskey), the results of these efforts may, in many cases, turn into kool-aid. Some groups appeared, at least superficially, to be more successful in pushing toward through the detailed (often emotional and contention-laden) storytelling to general proposals and resolutions than others -- possibly affected by moderator skill, group composition, the substance of the discussion or other procedural/institutional factors.

Possible research questions

1. Guttman & Thompson say that people have to interactionally discover shared principles, such as (in their examples) equality of opportunity. How did Common Ground participants test out various justifications? How were these revised (or not revised) in light of the responses of other participants, particularly those on the other side of the civic-developer divide? (There's a lot of work in conversation analysis about how people modify turns-in-progress in response to nonverbal and minimally verbal feedback.)

2. The discussions were almost always civil, but we know from recent history that the two sides are constantly at odds. What claims or arguments were *not* made in these discussions that may have been made in other venues? Or if they were made, how were they handled so that the discussion was not (that we observed, and we haven't listened to all the tapes) derailed?

3. The moderators were crucial for plucking encapsulatable principles from the rushing stream of talk. What kinds of formulations did they seize upon, and how did participants respond to their attempts to decontextualize talk?

4. More generally, how did participants respond to moderator attempts to steer conversation? When did they resist (and they sometimes did--David witnessed a self-described "mutiny") and how? And how did moderator interference in a conversation between participants affect its course, such as in terms of a person's ability to hold the floor long enough to explain a complex idea?

5. Once a moderator wrote down common ground principles, his or her work had just begun. After the meetings s/he had to polish (and further modify?) these in preparation for making them public. (All moderator reports are online.) What further changes to the principles were introduced along the way?

6. At the final stage, the event organizers took the pile of moderator reports and distilled and synthesized these into a smaller number of principles. While we weren't privy to these discussions, we can still ask: what did they do with between-group differences? In what other ways did they do more than just add up and summarize moderator reports?

7. The ZCC has promised to respond, in writing, to each of the final recommendations. From the perspective of the design of deliberative democracy, it is important to ask whether the recommendations have any discernible effect on the proposed zoning changes.

8. The existing zoning code is apparently an amazing patchwork of modifications and modifications of modifications. How were changes made to this document through time?