Place-Based Storytelling as a Foundation for Neighborhood Planning and Community Development

by

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May 9, 2018

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban Planning

Department of Urban and Regional Planning
Acknowledgements

I want to thank the members of my thesis committee: Drs. Zoé Hamstead, Elizabeth Walsh and Robert Silverman. As lead advisor, Dr. Hamstead’s guidance was invaluable, particularly on research design, pacing the work required to execute this project, and critically evaluating my writing. Dr. Walsh encouraged me to pursue this research and provided thoughtful advice on both methodology and ethical decision-making. Dr. Silverman’s knowledge of community development and qualitative research methods was indispensable.

I also want to thank the Community Design Center Rochester (CDCR) and the Charlotte Charrette Day Steering Committee for their partnership. I appreciate both organizations’ willingness to allow me to build off their hard work in planning a charrette, to play a small part in the event itself, and to recruit participants in their process for my research project. Special thanks to CDCR Executive Director Maria Furgiuele and Director of Design Services Aaron Lehman for their early guidance and feedback, and to Steering Committee Chairwoman Sue Roethel for her assistance in reaching out to potential participants.

Just as importantly, I want to thank the 13 residents of the Charlotte neighborhood in Rochester, N.Y., who volunteered to participate in this study and offered stories about life in their neighborhood so freely and openly. Their insights also made this project possible.

I also wish to thank the University at Buffalo Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Upstate New York Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) for their financial support of my graduate education. The Michael J. Krasner Memorial Scholarship awarded by the Upstate New York Chapter of the APA was particularly meaningful to me.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their support as I completed my graduate education. Special thanks to my wife, Anneke Nordmark; my daughter, Claire Alma Riley; my mother, Lynn Riley; and my mother- and father-in-law, Drucilla and Benjamin Nordmark. I also am grateful to my late father, Gerard Riley, for his love and encouragement, which also helped lead me here.
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the potential for place-based storytelling to enhance public engagement, participatory planning and community development processes. A growing body of literature suggests that storytelling can be a unique tool for eliciting and documenting experiential knowledge held by residents of a community. The literature, however, offers limited exploration of storytelling methodologies or how they might add value to established public engagement techniques. This study developed and tested a methodological approach to place-based group storytelling carried out in conjunction with a charrette led by a project partner, the Community Design Center Rochester, in Rochester, N.Y. The study tested four research questions that explored how information gathered through the storytelling exercise might differ from or add value to a charrette, and whether the storytelling process would help participants gain a more holistic understanding of their neighborhood, identify community assets and/or enhance social capital. The study employed thematic analysis of the participants’ responses, pre- and post-questionnaires, in-depth post-interviews, a charrette report developed by the project partner, my notes as a participant in the charrette, and a narrative of the storytelling event developed in collaboration with the participants to ground truth findings. This analysis clearly demonstrated that storytelling participants developed more nuanced and holistic knowledge of the community, distinct from what they learned in the charrette. This knowledge included an understanding of profoundly personal, emotional and spiritual reasons that other residents value certain neighborhood assets; divergent views about challenges and race relations in the neighborhood; and a more expansive conceptualization of assets in the neighborhood. The storytelling format also helped several participants to feel more at ease connecting and sharing with others than they felt during the charrette, suggesting potential to build social capital. These findings suggest that there is value in using this approach to storytelling to frame or drive community development and engagement processes. Potential
approaches include using storytelling to frame a process at its beginning, integrating elements of storytelling throughout it, or using storytelling as a standalone community-building process.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This project examined the potential for place-based storytelling to enhance public engagement, participatory planning and community development processes. It responded to a growing body of literature that suggests storytelling can be a unique way to elicit and document knowledge held by residents of a community. This literature is largely based on narrative inquiry, a branch of qualitative inquiry built on the understanding that people craft stories about their firsthand experiences as a way of constructing meaning in their lives (Bruner, 1986; Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988). In a planning context, such stories may be a unique medium for people to express experiential, intuitive, emotional and somatic knowledge about the places they know well (Sandercock & Attili, 2010; Rotella, 2003; Beauregard, 2003; Bulkens et al., 2015). Planners sometimes sideline this type of information in favor of knowledge deemed more rational, which certainly holds value; in isolation, however, it can present an incomplete picture of a community and the people who live in it (Sandercock, 2003a; Bulkens et al., 2015). Stories can reveal a rich sense of emotions, experiences and ideas – both examined and unexamined – that play important parts in shaping a community (Rotella, 2003). Stories also may allow the storyteller to access and express firsthand experiences and impressions of a place that are difficult to voice through other forms of communication (Little & Frogget, 2010). The literature also points to potential value in the process of sharing and listening to others’ stories, above and beyond the information that stories convey. The storytelling experience may help to foster empathy (Beauregard, 2003) and expand our sense of a place and our place within it (Eckstein, 2003). This all suggests potential for stories to capture and express the complexities of community life.

The literature, however, offers limited exploration of storytelling methodology. Relatively few studies explore in detail the types of information that stories convey and how this specific knowledge might inform planning or community development processes. The literature suggests
several topics worthy of exploration in this realm, but offers little direct scholarship on these subjects. These include a potential relationship between storytelling and asset-based community development (Pstross et al., 2009), as well as the potential to develop or enhance social capital by fostering empathy through a storytelling process (Gamson, 2002; Holt, 2008; Trout, 2010). In addition, few if any studies have examined how storytelling processes might yield results that differ from established public engagement techniques. Authors of the limited number of case studies to date have acknowledged the need for additional research on methodology (van Hulst, 2012; Pstross et al., 2009).

This study was largely a response to that call for methodological research. It focused on the development, implementation and analysis of a methodology for place-based storytelling. The project addressed four central research questions: whether the storytelling process would help participants to gain a more nuanced or holistic understanding of their neighborhood; yield results that differed from or added value to an established engagement process; assist participants in identifying a greater number or variety of community assets; or help to build or enhance social capital. These questions guided the design of a two-hour storytelling exercise, which I carried out in conjunction with an urban design charrette led by an external partner, the Community Design Center Rochester (CDCR). Both processes focused on the Charlotte neighborhood located along Lake Ontario and the Genesee River in Rochester, N.Y. I participated in the charrette as a facilitator in November 2017 and subsequently recruited a subgroup of 13 charrette participants to join the storytelling exercise in December 2017. This approach allowed me to examine whether the outcomes of the storytelling process differed from or added value to those of the charrette, an established public engagement process. The study employed thematic analysis of a variety of data sources, including the participants’ responses during the storytelling exercise; pre- and post-questionnaires completed by storytelling participants and a control group that participated only in the charrette; in-depth post-interviews with members of the storytelling group; a charrette report developed by CDCR; my own notes
as a charrette facilitator; and a narrative of the storytelling event that I developed collaboratively with the participants in order to ground truth my initial findings.

The evidence that emerged from this process clearly demonstrated potential for place-based storytelling to contribute to a more nuanced or holistic understanding of the neighborhood by shifting or expanding participants’ sense of the community or their place in it. Participants developed newfound knowledge of the deeply personal, emotional and spiritual reasons that their fellow residents value assets such as Lake Ontario, the Genesee River and the relatively natural setting of the river gorge. Several participants also learned about challenges of which they were previously unaware, including concerns about rampant crime at a specific apartment complex, and discussed the extent to which stereotypes and generalizations fueled at least some of these perceptions. Some participants then considered ways to better welcome and incorporate somewhat marginalized populations, including low-income renters and high school students who live outside the neighborhood, into the larger community. The project also led several participants to develop a more expansive understanding of assets in Charlotte, including individual people and civic groups. These outcomes differed from the charrette, which yielded a much more exhaustive inventory of physical assets and potential urban design interventions, but touched less often on other types of assets identified in the storytelling exercise or the more personal reasons that people valued them. The storytelling format also helped several participants to feel more at ease connecting and sharing with others than they felt during the charrette, suggesting potential for storytelling to help develop social capital.

These findings suggest that there is value in using this approach to storytelling to frame or form the foundation of a participatory planning or community development process. Approaches might include using storytelling to frame such a process at its beginning or integrating storytelling techniques or prompts throughout. Storytelling also may have value as a standalone community-building process as a way to help neighbors learn about each other’s perspectives, identify assets and challenges, and begin to build social capital.
There are a number of limitations to these findings, including evidence that the self-selected storytelling group was especially engaged in civic life in the neighborhood, leading them to offer perspectives that may differ from residents who are not as “plugged in.” The discussion at the storytelling exercise also highlighted the need to better manage remarks construed as unfair generalizations about entire races or classes of people, and to provide storytelling prompts that might help participants identify opportunities to effect change.

1.2 Report structure

In the subsequent section, I provide an overview of the literature and concepts that provided a basis for place-based storytelling and informed this project. I then discuss the conceptual framework on which I based my work. This is followed by a detailed discussion of methodology, including the central research questions, case selection, sampling procedure, data collection and my approach to analysis. I then describe findings, moving from pre-assessments to the storytelling workshop, post-interviews, case studies of individual participants' responses, a review of the charrette materials and the development of a narrative in collaboration with the exercise participants. In the next section, I elaborate on findings and provide a more detailed discussion of the study's implications and limitations. Finally, I review key implications and potential next steps for further study.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stories as meaning-making

This project is rooted in narrative inquiry, a branch of qualitative inquiry concerned with examining and interpreting firsthand biographical narratives (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry is based on the understanding that people construct meaning in their lives by crafting stories about their direct experiences (Bruner, 1986; Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988). Much of the literature on storytelling in planning and community development adopts a similar framing, and it is based on some of the same foundational literature; however, in addition to firsthand narratives, some scholars also have explored stories about visions for the future (Pstross et al., 2014) and community myths and folklore (Little & Froggett, 2010), and how these too convey meaning that can be instructive in the development of a plan. Much of the literature uses the terms “story” and “narrative” interchangeably, referring to stories that construct and/or convey the meaning of lived experiences. I adopt the same terminology throughout this discussion.

In a planning context, the concept of narrative as a constructive, meaning-making process extends to the stories we tell about places (Childs, 2008; Eckstein, 2003; Little & Froggett, 2010; Pstross et al., 2014; Sandercock, 2003a; Sandercock & Attili, 2010; Throgmorton, 2003; van Hulst, 2012). Stories can impart important information about places and the people who inhabit them, and stories are a unique construct for conveying specific types of information. This can include revealing values and tacit understandings that a storyteller has assigned to a place (Polanyi, 1966); explaining how a place relates to broader social and cultural contexts; expressing and formulating stakeholders’ hopes and visions for a place’s future (Pstross et al., 2014); and accessing and expressing place-based experiences and relationships (Little & Froggett, 2010) in greater depth than other forms of participatory planning or public engagement might otherwise allow.

Stories not only construct meaning for the teller, but are a tool for constructing, reflecting and reinforcing social and political meaning. In a place-based context, there is no single, shared
narrative about a neighborhood or a community. Instead, there is a multi-layered, often-competing web of stories that various people and groups assign to a single place. These place-based stories can be used to claim ownership of a place or to attempt to define its identity. These claims are shaped by socioeconomic class, race, gender and political affiliation, as well as the power (or lack of power) that these positions impart to the storyteller (Sandercock, 2003b). It is therefore important to view stories not only as vehicles of personal meaning, but expressions and tools of political struggle (Sandercock, 2003b), either reinforcing or challenging sociopolitical positions, statuses and systems.

2.2 Place-based stories: by whom, for whom?

Stories and storytelling have long played an important, if underappreciated, part in planning and community development. Jane Addams – a sociologist, a social worker and a founder of the settlement house movement in the late 19th century – explored storytelling extensively in her work, which was foundational for community development in the U.S. In her writing, Addams blended voices of regular people with scientific inquiry, mixing sociological data with descriptions of street scenes and the firsthand stories of recent immigrants (Joslin, 2010). While reliant on non-fiction sources, Addams’ work moved away “from the monologic prose of science and toward the dialogic or polyvocal possibilities of fiction” (Joslin, 33, 2010). In her essay “The Devil-Baby at Hull House,” Addams analyzed the meanings of stories told by ordinary women in a settlement house community (Addams, 1916). This is but one example of how firsthand biographical narratives played an important part in even this early stage of work to organize and improve quality of life in communities.

Despite this rich history, the role of storytelling in planning and community development has become a subject of direct scholarship only in the past 30 or so years. Van Hulst (2012) argues that this body of literature can be broadly classified into two categories: research that examines storytelling as a model of planning, and storytelling as a model for planning. The
former is mainly concerned with the stories that planners use in their work, while the latter focuses on stories shared by the public or stakeholders during planning processes. The first branch of research includes Forester’s (1993, 1999) studies of everyday stories that planners tell about their jobs and how these stories inform practice. Also in this vein, Throgmorton argues that whether consciously or not, planners are “authors who write texts (plans, analyses, articles)” (1993, p. 2), constructing stories to convey their work. This branch of the literature recognizes that stories hold special importance in the practice of planning, but often argues that planners understand and value stories too little (Sandercock, 2003b). The second category that van Hulst described examines how stakeholders’ stories could improve planning practice. This approach focuses on ways in which planning could be “more inclusive, more democratic, if citizens are offered the space to tell their stories” (van Hulst, 2012, p. 303). While van Hulst frames these two branches of the literature as distinct, they are not somehow mutually exclusive or in conflict. In fact, researchers often are interested in both modes of storytelling and explore both modes in their writing; Throgmorton and Forester both have explored storytelling as a model of and for planning (van Hulst, 2012).

2.2.1 Stories as a tool for planners to persuade. Van Hulst’s framing is a helpful starting point when first approaching the literature, but his framing can be refined. Much of the literature explores three intertwined questions. The first asks how planners can use storytelling skills to more effectively and persuasively convey their work and its overriding message to an audience. This is a somewhat narrower framing than van Hulst’s concept of storytelling as a model of planning. This branch of the literature is primarily concerned with stories as a communication tool, used by and for planners. Portions (but certainly not all) of Forester and Throgmorton’s work fall into this category. Throgmorton, for example, writes that planners should approach their work as “a process of constructing persuasive stories about the future of cities” (1993, p. 6). A planner may seek out stories from people in a community partly to understand what
themes and language may be most persuasive to them, and should therefore be incorporated into a plan (Throgmorton, 2003a). Guhathakurta (2002) argues that planners should discuss mathematical and computer-based modeling in the language of stories, rather than the language of scientific analysis, which is foreign to many audiences; narrative can make a greater impression on the public about the model’s predictions. These approaches view stories as a means for a planner to communicate an idea in a way that resonates with an intended audience.

2.2.2 Stories as a source of community knowledge for planners. The second major question raised in the literature is what kind of knowledge planners can glean from stories told by others, and how this knowledge can improve the work of planners. This research focuses mainly on the nature of information or knowledge conveyed through stories told within communities and about communities, how it may differ from other types of information available to planners, and how planners might interpret that information.

This approach recognizes stories as a distinct form of communication, and is primarily interested in understanding how stories can or should inform plans or community development processes. Stories are a medium through which a storyteller can access and share firsthand experiences and impressions in ways that might not be possible through other means of communication (Little & Froggett, 2010). Stories reveal a richer sense of the both examined and unexamined ideas and notions that shape the inner lives of people who live in a neighborhood (Rotella, 2003). “Those inner lives play significant roles in real-world decisions about when to stay and when to go, who to vote for and what to buy, when and how much to commit to one’s community, how far and how deep one’s sense of that community extends” (Rotella, 2003, p. 109). Stories, along with the tone and demeanor of the people sharing them, can tell us much about the emotional life of a place as the speaker reflects on what “degrades or enhances their daily life, might influence their future, or violates or supports their values” (Rotella, 1998). Urban
planners and designers may be able to catalogue local stories to help inform them about “the narrative fabric” of a neighborhood, which is made up of elements such as residents’ tales about everyday life, names of streets and other components of the built environment, and stories conveyed through local newspapers or advertising campaigns (Childs, 2008). This narrative landscape is “as much a critical part of the context of a site as the soil type” (Childs, 2008, p. 184).

It is important to note that there are limits to what stories can convey and accomplish. While they may be a valuable way to capture emotional knowledge, they also can be used to reinforce sentimentality or allow the teller to make claims of moral purity or superiority (Beauregard, 2003). Stories also can be told strategically to manipulate and mislead (Beauregard, 2003). Planners need to understand the mechanisms of stories not only so they can craft effective narratives themselves, but so they can more critically listen to those used in everyday planning and political processes (Sandercock, 2003b).

2.2.3 Storytelling process as a form of community development. The third and final question, somewhat overlooked in van Hulst’s framework, asks whether the act of storytelling produces outcomes distinct from gathering and studying the content of stories themselves. This literature examines whether the process of constructing, sharing and listening to place-based stories is beneficial for those involved in the storytelling process, particularly in a community development context. Through this lens, understanding the storytelling process becomes as important as the stories themselves. This storytelling process can be a means of eliciting and documenting experiential, intuitive and somatic forms of knowledge, instead of the “rational” knowledge usually favored in planning and development (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). The process also may foster empathy among storytellers and listeners (Beauregard, 2003), and create more democratic communities by fostering a sense of belonging or contributing to a community (Zipes, 1995). Lacking the experience of hearing others’ stories regularly in daily life,
“we will grow increasingly ignorant, fearful and distrustful of one another … we will find ourselves crying and shouting at one another in more formal settings, completely unable to understand our differing points of view” (Throgmorton, 2003b).

Much of this portion of the literature blurs the traditional distinction between planners and others who participate in a planning process. For example, in their approach to a community development project built on multimedia storytelling, Sandercock and Attili (2010) describe working together with residents to co-construct stories about their community, rather than simply collecting and interpreting stories as a traditional planner or outside “expert.” This approach was meant to address the types of ethical concerns that Eckstein (2003) described with the ways that planners have traditionally used community stories in their work. Planners often listen to stories of residents and stakeholders, and claim to use them to inform plans; yet too often, planners do this to legitimize their work while ignoring much of the stories’ content, and providing little agency to the citizens who share them. To avoid this trap, planners should focus on process design and be judged by “how successfully they create a three-dimensional or textual space amenable to multiple stories, how well the arrangement of that space produces provocative interaction among the stories, and thus how well and how broadly the stories are heard” (Eckstein, 2003, p. 22). Sandercock and Attili (2010) take this concern with process design a step farther with their concept of collaborative planning, wherein planners and community members work to co-develop strategies to address shared values and needs. Researchers or planners involved in this type of storytelling must cooperate with residents and stakeholders to find original and contextualized ways to conduct and interpret research (Sandercock & Attili, 2010).

2.2.4 **Reconciling three approaches to stories and storytelling.** It is difficult to completely disentangle these three approaches, but this literature review and overall project focus primarily
on the latter two (stories as a medium for community knowledge, and stories as a form of community development). Storytelling certainly has practical applications for a planner in the writing and presentation of a plan, as suggested in the first approach (stories as a tool for planners to persuade). Yet there is a danger in thinking about stories primarily as a tool for effective communication or persuasion. It certainly is important to understand the impact that planners’ stories have on the communities they serve; the way that planners write and speak “shapes community, character and culture,” and so planners must choose their language and framing carefully (Throgmorton, 2003, p. 130).

At the same time, the framing of the first question is a planner-centric way of approaching a potentially rich and nuanced source of information. This element of the literature also gives little attention to storytelling processes and how they, too, might benefit planning or community development processes. It also misses opportunities to experiment with traditional power dynamics and relationships between planners and the community residents with whom they plan. At worst, thinking of stories mainly from a planner’s perspective runs the risk of taking advantage of people’s stories and offering little in return. “If one listens to others’ stories with ears tuned to how their stories will serve one’s own storytelling, how they will fit into one’s grander narrative, then one risks not hearing them at all” (Eckstein, 2003, p. 16).

2.3 Stories and storytelling in practice

From this largely conceptual foundation, the literature explores the potential applications of stories and storytelling in planning and community development. This work falls into two basic forms: essays that advance theory about storytelling, and case studies.

2.3.1 Theoretical applications and benefits. In the category of theory, there is considerable attention to the potential for stories to capture and express the complexities of community life during a time of wicked problems and uncertainty. For example, Eckstein and Throgmorton’s
Story and Sustainability (2003) is a collection of essays that explores the role of stories in planning for a more sustainable and just future in the face of climate change and rising inequality.

Traditionally, planning avoids much discussion of emotion in favor of supposedly rational discourse (Sandercock, 2003a). Yet planners paint a strangely incomplete picture of community life by discussing the complex problems of urban life without addressing “memory, desire, spirit, playfulness, eroticism and fantasy,” or discussing community “without talking about longings and belongings, losses and fears, guilt and trauma, anger and betrayal” (Sandercock, 2003a, p. 153). Sandercock (2003a) argues that creating and using stories and storytelling to explore these emotions can be part of a “therapeutic approach” to planning that confronts people’s fears and engages their hopes for transformation. To this end, Rotella (2003) describes stories in planning as a way to capture the “city of feeling,” “not the stories of objective experts relating detached insights about others’ problems in a ‘city of fact’” (p. 69).

Others describe stories as an integral part of democratic or grassroots decision-making as both a process and goal (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). Stories can be a vehicle for identifying points for intervention in a plan for social change or community organizing (Reinsborough & Canning, 2017). Citizens need public spaces where they can encounter and hear stories from strangers, enabling people of diverse backgrounds to better “frame a sense of what is, reflect on what needs to be done, and then engage with others about the sensibility of their stories,” (Beauregard, 2003, p. 65). Throgmorton suggests that we need to regularly hear stories about the remote effects of our environmentally unsustainable actions to be persuaded that our lifestyles must change (2003b). This is one way that hearing others’ stories can help to “defamiliarize” places, cultural boundaries and habits that are so familiar that we take them for granted, and allow us to expand our sense of what a place is and our place in it (Eckstein, 2003). Only a particular kind of storytelling can accomplish this, and it is not the kind that typically takes place in public meetings or boardrooms (van Hulst, 2012). The type of storytelling
that contributes to an inclusive, community-focused practice is “one in which many actors with
different backgrounds, perspectives, values and interests come together and respectfully
engage one another in the search for a way to deal with differences or even to live together in
harmony” (van Hulst, 2012, p. 305).

The literature also advances a number of theories about likely outcomes from the
experience of sharing and listening to others’ stories. This process can promote empathy
(Gamson, 2002) and create a stronger sense of belonging in a community (Zipes, 1995), both
important elements of social capital (Holt, 2008; Trout, 2010). Hearing a story can move an
audience to reconsider and rewrite its own personal narratives (Chase, 2005) to reflect a more
nuanced understanding of a place. A storytelling process can give marginalized people a
narrative space from which to participate in social and political processes (Chase, 2005). The
process also can contribute to or challenge social discourse (Little & Froggett, 2010).
Incorporated into a planning process, storytelling has potential to create plans better informed
by a nuanced understanding of the community’s narrative landscape (Childs, 2008) and provide
a more democratic and inclusive approach to plan development (van Hulst, 2012).

2.3.2 Case studies. The case study literature explores how these theoretical outcomes might
be achieved through various methodological approaches in planning and community
development settings. Sandercock and Attili (2010) and van Hulst (2012) suggest approaches
rooted in ethnography and narrative analysis. Sandercock and Attili’s (2010) approach is unique
in that it incorporates multimedia as the main vehicle for gathering and exploring stories, which
the researchers acquired through depth interviews and extensive interaction with their subjects
to build trust over time. This approach emphasizes reflexivity, a reflective and self-critical
approach to research that recognizes the researcher cannot be completely objective, nor
remove his or her background, identity, perceptions or biases from methodological decisions,
data collection and analytical approaches (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Mruck & Breuer, 2003).
The process of collecting stories on video and showing edited versions to the storytellers provided opportunities for participants to reflect on and revise their narratives, and for the researcher and subjects to work collaboratively to craft the final product (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Van Hulst (2012) used a more traditional ethnographic approach, employing a combination of interviews and semi-participant observation at public meetings during the planning of a new town center. Four basic narratives about the project emerged in the community during the planning process, but only some gained currency in discussion among town leaders. The process might have been improved by seeking out and providing space for alternative narratives largely ignored by the political leadership, who assigned outsized significance to narratives that reinforced their pre-existing goals and assumptions (van Hulst, 2012).

Other researchers have used participatory group storytelling events as part of community development projects (Little & Froggett, 2010; Pstross et al., 2014). Working in a low-income community, Little and Froggett asked participants to develop fictional stories rooted in a mix of local folk tales, mythology and urban legends. The resulting stories tended to be narratives of personal progress with flawed protagonists who discovered resources through their own vulnerability (Little & Froggett, 2010). Overall, the storytelling process was “a prime means of cultural transmission, mediating the perceptions of others and the interdependencies within the communities by allowing a complex and ambivalent view of aspirations, actions and motivations” (Little & Froggett, 2010, p. 459). Another approach employed “catalytic storytelling” as part of an asset-mapping study in a school district (Pstross et al., 2014). This approach was rooted in asset-based community development (ABCD), a framework that emphasizes identifying and leveraging existing resources in a community to solve challenges, rather than the potentially damaging approach of always framing discussion around a community’s problems (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Through a mix of focus groups and individual interviews, the researchers compiled a community storybook meant to stimulate further discussion about the
future (Pstross et al., 2014). The researchers largely focused on questions that asked participants to envision their community’s future, as well as how people could cooperate to clear barriers to achieve this future. In this approach, Pstross et al. (2014) argued that the process of engaging community members in conversations about questions is central to community building, even more so than exploring the answers that emerge from the process.

Other researchers offer insights on either analysis or process design. Narrative interviews, or storytelling, can be used to explore how individuals understand their relationship to spatial planning processes, as well as their own visions for a specific landscape (Bulkens et al., 2015). This approach has been used to identify deep emotional attachments that people have to landscapes, which often are sidelined by “experts” even during supposedly participatory planning processes (Bulkens et al., 2015). Elsewhere in the community development literature, group storytelling has been used as a means of conflict resolution, fostering mutual learning and meaning-making (Lau & Seedat, 2014).

2.3.3 Limitations in the literature. The theoretical branch of the literature provides a strong foundation for research on storytelling in a planning and community development context. As the case studies show, however, this is still a relatively new subject of scholarship. As there are relatively few examples of research on both methodological applications and analytical approaches, there is ample space to experiment with methodology in new and creative ways. The literature also offers few, if any, direct comparisons of whether and how the information gained from stories might differ from other information gained through a more established participatory planning process. Nor does the literature examine how the storytelling experience might yield benefits that differ in any measurable way from (or add to) such an established process. Methodological designs employed in the case studies are instructive, but limited, with several research projects based primarily on individual interviews without exploring group storytelling, whose potential is identified elsewhere in the literature.
The theoretical literature also has identified several promising topics for exploration, but only a few have been examined in any depth. For example, Beauregard (2003) and others discuss how the storytelling process may foster empathy and capture the emotional life of communities – both important elements of social capital (Trout, 2010; Holt, 2008). Social capital is the “social glue” or connections that hold a community together, as defined under the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Emery & Flora, 2006), or relationships of trust embedded within social networks (Light, 2004). The literature, however, has yet to explicitly examine the relationship between storytelling and social capital. Further, while Pstross et al. (2014) identified a potential link between storytelling and ABCD, their methodology provided no direct assessment of whether the storytelling process helped to identify or provide a deeper or more expansive understanding of community assets. While the connection between story and place is critical in the theoretical literature, questions used in the case studies sometimes were general enough that the responses may not directly relate to the place in question, or alternately were constructed to elicit answers on a community-wide scale instead of a more specific neighborhood scale. The latter would seem to offer rich opportunities to explore people’s connections to the places most familiar and intimate to them. The approaches to storytelling also are in some cases limited, without relying on tales of firsthand experiences that other literature suggests carry particular meaning to the storyteller, or asking participants more for general reflections than specific narratives.

Authors of the limited case studies to date acknowledge the limitations of their work and have called explicitly for others to experiment with methodology. Van Hulst (2012) writes that there is a need to combine theoretical work on storytelling with ethnographically-rooted fieldwork, as well as to observe the forms of storytelling already used, consciously or unconsciously, in standard planning practice. Moreover, additional research is needed on their concept of catalytic storytelling and whether it can create meaningful community change over
time (Pstross et al., 2009). All this makes clear that there is ample opportunity to contribute to research on methodological design for storytelling in planning and community development.
3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Narrative inquiry

This project shares the framing of narrative inquiry in that it accepts the understanding of people’s stories about their direct experiences as a primary means of constructing meaning in their lives (Bruner, 1986; Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988) and as a constructive, meaning-making process when applied to places (Childs, 2008; Eckstein, 2003; Little & Froggett, 2010; Pstross et al., 2014; Sandercock, 2003a; Sandercock & Attili, 2010; Throgmorton, 2003; van Hulst, 2012). This project is built on established theories that stories impart important information about places and the people who inhabit them, and that stories are a unique construct for conveying that information, including the storyteller’s values and tacit assumptions (Polanyi, 1966), hopes and desires for the future of a place (Pstross et al., 2014), and place-based experiences and relationships (Little & Froggett, 2010). Moreover, this project adopts established theories that the process of sharing a story has outcomes distinct from the content of the narrative itself, as discussed above.

3.2 Research focus

This research focuses on several topics described as potentially beneficial for planning and community development in the theoretical literature, but explored to a limited extent in existing case studies. By revealing values and tacit assumptions, providing a forum to develop visions for the future, and expressing nuanced experiences and relationships, stories have the potential to contribute to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of complex communities and people. Eckstein (2003) and Throgmorton (2003) clearly demonstrate the value of such an understanding to better navigate a world of increasing uncertainty and complex challenges. There also is clear potential for the outcomes described above to identify important assets that can be used as a foundation for planning and community development (Pstross et al., 2014). Identifying and leveraging neighborhood assets is central to ABCD, which emphasizes putting
the assets and achievements of a place and its inhabitants at the forefront of change processes by identifying and building on a community's existing strengths and resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This is not to say that challenges are ignored, but continuously making problems the primary focus of planning and community development efforts can be disempowering and ultimately damaging to the people who live in a community (Zastrow, 2008). ABCD instead attempts to address challenges by focusing on the community’s strengths.

ABCD has been criticized in some of the community development literature for failing to consider the larger social, political and systemic forces that shape neighborhoods (Christensen & Levinson, 2003). In their guide to ABCD, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) argue that neighborhoods often have no choice but to rely on their own resources, implying that external support systems often are unavailable to them, and that they cannot simply wait for larger, more systemic changes to materialize. Miller (1996) has criticized Kretzmann and McKnight for basing their approach on a fundamental misunderstanding and misplaced rejection of community organizing. Miller argued that while the recognition of assets and community development are useful tools, they are just that – tools in a larger and more important struggle to organize for a more just and democratic society.

This project adopts the assumption that there is value in identifying and examining assets as part of planning and community development, even if the specific ABCD framework has flaws or limitations. This project also adopts the position that stories have unique potential to identify what residents view as assets of their neighborhood or community. McKnight and Block (2010) have described a connection between ABCD and storytelling, writing that “stories of a competent community are a narrative about our talents, properties, and gifts.”

Further, by fostering empathy and a more nuanced understanding of others’ perspectives, a storytelling process that involves multiple participants also has potential to foster social capital (Emery & Flora, 2006). The CCF also can be viewed as an asset-focused
approach to community development, in that the seven capitals\(^1\) identified under CCF can be considered types of assets. Social capital is a particularly powerful asset in community development in that it is a democratic resource that is relatively more available to low-income or marginalized communities, and it can be used to access or enhance other forms of capital (Light, 2004). “Social capital usually powers the agency of the most deprived who, possessing this resource, can obtain on its account greater values of all the other capitals, thus improving their welfare. Thus understood, social capital is a kind of philosopher’s stone in that, costing no money and available to even the most humble, it can metamorphose into rare and precious values” (Light, 2004, p. 30). This project is particularly concerned with the extent to which storytelling can foster the creation or enhancement of social capital in a community.

### 3.3 Ethical framework

As an ethical framework, this project adopts elements of Sandercock and Attili’s (2010, p. 28) approach to “collaborative planning,” defined as a “contextualized and situational practice in which planners and communities co-develop strategies to address shared values and needs.” This approach recognizes there is an ethical dilemma in the role of a planner or researcher, as an outsider, claiming to speak on behalf of others or understand their stories; it also responds to a history of planners and ethnographers using the stories of others while offering little or nothing in return (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Collaborative planning requires the researcher and subjects to remain in dialogue about ways in which they can work together to shape the research and design its outcome. The researcher and other participants function as co-creators of place-based stories, with neighborhood stakeholders providing the stories, and the researcher shaping the dynamics of the narrative space in which the storytellers share their

\(^1\) The seven Community Capitals are social capital, human capital (skills or abilities of individuals), natural capital (or natural resources), cultural capital (or cultural knowledge), political capital (access to people or organizations with power), financial capital, and built capital (infrastructure and buildings) (Emery & Flora, 2006).
experiences and directing the topics explored. The researcher and subjects then collaboratively design the final reporting of the stories and key themes explored.
4 DETAILED METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research questions

This project was designed as a contribution to methodology for using storytelling to facilitate neighborhood and community development, and more broadly, as a method for people to co-construct the meanings of places. Proceeding from the conceptual framework described above, this project seeks to answer four research questions:

- Can a facilitated, place-based group storytelling exercise help participants to develop a more nuanced and holistic understanding of their community? With this question, I was interested in the potential of storytelling to reveal information or perspectives that challenge the listener to rewrite or refine his or her own narratives (Chase, 2005). These new narratives would reflect an understanding of a place that has shifted from before the exercise or expanded to make space for additional, heretofore unknown perspectives, facts or experiences. This can be measured or detected by identifying instances in which participants describe having their thinking or knowledge challenged, changed or expanded because of a story heard during the exercise.

- Can this story-driven exercise yield outcomes that differ from and/or add value to an established public engagement method, such as a charrette? By adding value, I refer to whether the storytelling process can elicit and document themes that differ from those that surface through the charrette process, and which might also prove instructive in developing a neighborhood plan or community development strategy by identifying additional assets; revealing new ways in which assets may be valuable to the community; identifying additional challenges that must be addressed in order for a plan or community development strategy to succeed; or giving voice to different visions for the future of the community.

- Can this exercise help participants to identify a greater number or variety of assets in their community?
Can this exercise build social capital among participants? This study seeks to measure social capital by documenting instances in which participants describe any sense of connection or trust for one another, speak explicitly about helping one another through social connections, or engage in any follow-up communication after the exercise.

If the answer to some or all of these questions were Yes, it would suggest that this particular storytelling process has potential to help participants become co-creators of community narratives, rooted in a richer understanding of the complexity of a place and its inhabitants; to inventory and better understand the assets at their disposal in such a place; and to help foster social capital among neighbors.

4.2 Case selection

Because the concept of place is central to this research, choosing a location was one of the first major decisions in research design. It also was important to identify an opportunity to compare the outcomes of the storytelling methodology tested in this project to established participatory methods. To identify a neighborhood case, a pool of potential participants and a planning process for comparison, I worked with the Community Design Center Rochester (CDCR). CDCR is a nonprofit staffed by urban design professionals who conduct public engagement processes and promote quality design of the built environment throughout the nine-county² Finger Lakes region surrounding Rochester (CDCR, 2016). I developed a relationship with CDCR staff while completing an internship there in the summer of 2017. CDCR’s work is characteristic of the community design movement, which arose in the 1960s and 1970s largely in response to a public challenge from civil rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr. to architects to stand against racism and classism in their work (Dorgan, 2012). The community design approach emphasizes community participation in development, planning and

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² The nine counties in CDCR’s service territory are Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming and Yates. The bulk of CDCR’s work is in Monroe.
neighborhood transformation (Dorgan, 2012). While a number of community design centers are affiliated with universities, CDCR operates independently, with a board representing both practitioners and academics (CDCR, 2016). It specializes in public engagement processes that deal with neighborhood design, including charrettes, or intensive day-long events that bring together community stakeholders with planners and architects to brainstorm design solutions to neighborhood problems (CDCR, 2016). CDCR documents the outcomes of each charrette process in a detailed report meant to help neighborhood residents establish and advocate for goals and principles for their community’s development. Charrettes are a method widely used by designers and architects across the U.S., although the process varies from place to place; there is a National Charrette Institute that trains practitioners in best practices for these collaborative processes (National Charrette Institute, 2017).

At the outset of this project, CDCR’s staff was in the midst of the months-long process of planning a charrette in the Charlotte (pronounced “shar-LOT”) neighborhood of Rochester, NY. Charlotte is located on the Lake Ontario waterfront, which is about eight miles north of the city’s downtown (Figure 1). The City of Rochester retained CDCR to conduct the charrette. The city chose to sponsor the exercise after a proposed waterfront hotel and condominium development on city property in Charlotte encountered significant opposition from neighborhood residents and ultimately failed in 2016 when the developer did not produce proof of financing to carry out the project (Sharp, 2017). In effect, the city sought CDCR to restart a decades-long conversation about the shape and direction of development of the waterfront and the surrounding neighborhood. Through several mayoral administrations over the past 25 years, the city has commissioned numerous proposals for the Port of Rochester, where the Genesee River empties into Lake Ontario, as well as for large, city-owned parking areas bordering Ontario Beach Park (Figure 2) and the neighborhood’s main commercial corridor, Lake Avenue (Sharp, 2017; Sharp, 2014). Many of these proposals encountered opposition from residents, who often argued the ideas were out of character with their neighborhood (Sharp, 2014).
Figure 1. Map of the Charlotte Neighborhood of Rochester, NY

Data source: New York State GIS Clearinghouse

I have some firsthand familiarity with this neighborhood and its development history for two reasons. First, I wrote about the 2016 development proposal as a reporter for Rochester’s daily newspaper, the *Democrat & Chronicle*. This coverage involved interviewing neighborhood residents, the developer and city officials; attending community meetings about the project; and obtaining and reviewing public records and plans for the proposed development. A year after I left the newspaper to enter the Master of Urban Planning program at the University at Buffalo, I interned with CDCR, where I assisted with several projects, including preparations for the
Charlotte charrette during the summer of 2017. My responsibilities for the Charlotte project primarily entailed conducting historical research on the neighborhood; taking notes at meetings between a stakeholder steering committee and CDCR staff; and drafting correspondence and other written materials about the project for CDCR staff.

Selecting Charlotte as a location was both a practical and strategic decision. First, CDCR and the stakeholder steering committee agreed to allow me to recruit people who planned to participate in the Nov. 4, 2017 charrette for a subsequent storytelling exercise. This approach would allow me to compare the outcomes of the charrette and the storytelling exercise to understand whether my methodology brought added value, or whether the storytelling process yielded outcomes that differed materially from an existing and well-established methodology that also emphasizes exploring stakeholders’ goals and visions for a community. Second, this approach provided a sizeable pool of potential storytellers – according to CDCR, some 76 stakeholders participated in the charrette – as well as a means of contacting people who pre-registered for the event through the steering committee. Third, my partnership with CDCR and the steering committee provided a level of credibility and exposure to a pool of potential participants that I would not likely have had if I approached the neighborhood as an independent graduate student. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I anticipated a variety of compelling stories and themes to explore in Charlotte, given its history of controversial redevelopment efforts, the neighborhood’s unique landscape and natural resources, its colorful history as an early Great Lakes port village and one-time resort destination (Barnes, 1975), and a more recent reputation outside the neighborhood as a “rough” place where adolescents sometimes fight in the beach area (MacIntyre-Yee, 2016). To facilitate comparisons between the charrette and storytelling exercise, I scheduled the exercise roughly one month after the charrette at the Charlotte Branch Library, a location selected for its convenience to participants and its position as an established community resource and meeting place.
4.2.1 Case location and demographics. Charlotte is connected to the rest of the city primarily by its main thoroughfare, Lake Avenue, which extends south from the waterfront to its intersection with Lyell Avenue just outside downtown, where the name changes to State Street. Charlotte was originally an incorporated village, but the City of Rochester annexed it in 1916, seeking to preserve the city’s access to the port where the Genesee River empties into Lake Ontario, and the economic success of what was then a major destination for resorts and entertainment (Barnes, 1975). Charlotte’s exact southern border is not entirely clear, but the city-owned Riverside Cemetery and the Catholic Holy Sepulchre Cemetery are generally viewed as the dividing line between Charlotte and Maplewood, the neighborhood immediately to the south. Demonstrating that the border is somewhat debatable, however, one participant in the
storytelling workshop who lives in an apartment building near the two cemeteries described contacting community associations for both neighborhoods to find out which to approach about neighborhood matters. Ultimately, both invited apartment tenants to participate in their meetings. Charlotte’s western border is much clearer, as it forms the city line with a neighboring suburb, the Town of Greece. The neighborhood is bordered to the east by the river and to the north by the lake.

Monroe County Census Tracts 85 and 86 incorporate much of this area, extending from the cemeteries north to the lakefront, bordered to the west by the Greece/Rochester line and to the east by the river. About 7,600 people live in these tracts, or 4% of the total population of the City of Rochester (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). Population density figures for Tract 85 are likely misleading, due to the presence of the large cemeteries. There are 4,024 people per square mile in Tract 86, which incorporates the portion of the neighborhood along the waterfront (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). This is less dense than the city as a whole, at 5,877 people per square mile, but twice as dense as neighboring Greece (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). The population in these tracts is older than the city as a whole (20% of residents are over the age of 65, compared to 10% in the city) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). There also are fewer children in Charlotte than the overall city, 12% of the neighborhood population is under 18 compared to 23.6% in the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). The neighborhood is much less racially and ethnically diverse than the city as a whole, though it should be noted that Charlotte is certainly not the only city neighborhood that is majority White. Many neighborhoods within Rochester and the city and towns in Monroe County are segregated along racial, ethnic and economic lines; the Rochester Metropolitan Area is more racially segregated than most regions of similar size in the U.S. (Doherty, 2013). While 46% of city residents are White, 85% of residents in Tracts 85 and 86 are White; 41% of city residents are Black, compared to 11% in Charlotte; and 18% of city residents are Hispanic, compared to 4% in Charlotte (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). Greece has a smaller Black population than Charlotte (7%), but a slightly
larger Hispanic population (5%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). Educational attainment in these two tracts is higher than the city as a whole, largely due to the fact that there are far fewer adults in Charlotte without a high school diploma (10%, compared to 19% citywide) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016). The neighborhood’s median household income is somewhat higher than the city’s ($33,900 compared to $31,700), but significantly lower than in Greece, at $55,410 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016).

4.3 Sampling procedure

Strategic or purposive sampling was used to select charrette participants to join the storytelling exercise. To address the research questions for this project, it was critical to identify people who participated in both processes and could reflect on how they differed or were similar. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research when the researcher is not interested in the central tendency of a large group, but in the thoughts, actions or feelings of a particular type of person or a specific group (Palys, 2008). Specifically, this project relied on criterion sampling, or recruiting individuals with a particular background (Charlotte residents) and experience (participation in the charrette).

To recruit participants, the stakeholder steering committee distributed an email invitation on my behalf to everyone who pre-registered for the charrette, which included the vast majority of individuals who participated in the Nov. 4 event. I also briefly addressed participants in person at the charrette and asked for anyone interested in the project to speak with me, follow up by email or phone, or pick up a flyer about the event to learn more. The steering committee sent a second email invitation following the charrette. Finally, the neighborhood association posted a promotional flyer on its Facebook page at my request.
4.4 Data collection

Because a storytelling exercise is the centerpiece of this project, it was clear that a transcription of an audio recording of the event would be the central piece of data I would need to analyze. I then considered how I would identify and measure concepts responsive to my research questions in the transcript text. Thinking about how I would go about assessing the answers to my questions helped me to conceptualize the other types of data I would need to collect and how I would need to approach analysis.

Two of my research questions clearly required pre- and post-exercise assessment. To measure whether participants in the exercise developed a more nuanced and holistic understanding of their community, I would need to identify whether the participants’ perception of their neighborhood had changed. This would require collecting information about their sense of the character and composition of the neighborhood before the exercise and then assessing afterward whether the participants had modified their earlier understanding or expanded it to incorporate additional perspectives, facts or experiences. This would require identifying instances in which participants described having their thinking or knowledge challenged, changed or expanded from the experience of listening to others’ stories. This might be an explicit acknowledgement of thinking differently, or an indirect remark that suggested the individual’s perspective had shifted, which would require additional questions to probe further. Determining whether the exercise helped participants to identify more or different types of assets also would require pre- and post-assessment.

To determine whether the outcomes of the storytelling workshop differed from those of the charrette, I would need to collect and analyze themes from both events and compare their similarities and differences, with particular attention to identification of different types of assets and varied explanations of their value, identification of different types of challenges to the community, and different visions for the neighborhood's future. Measuring the development of social capital would require a close analysis of the storytelling transcript for instances in which
participants expressed connection or trust for one another or offered to leverage a social network to help one another. I would also need a post-assessment of the relationships or follow-up communication that the participants developed with one another, if any.

Accordingly, I developed multiple approaches to data collection, including pre- and post-assessment questionnaires, a review of charrette materials, a group storytelling exercise, one-on-one post-interviews with storytelling participants, and the collaborative writing of a narrative about the storytelling exercise. This wealth of data allowed a detailed analysis of perceptions of the neighborhood held by participants before and after the storytelling exercise, and themes and outcomes that emerged from both the charrette and storytelling exercise.

Discussion follows on methodological decisions on data collection and how each element relates to the central research questions.

4.4.1 Pre- and post-assessment. Participants in the storytelling exercise were asked to complete a pre- and post-questionnaire with 11 to 15 open response questions. The questionnaire format was selected largely due to time constraints; while both pre- and post-interviews would have yielded richer data, it was not feasible to complete pre-interviews in the time available between the completion of research design and the exercise held in December 2017. The questionnaires used open responses, an approach that is appropriate for studies in which the range of possible responses exceeds what a researcher could feasibly provide on a response list, or when the question requires a detailed answer (Frey, 2004).

Questions were designed to inventory assets of which the participants were aware in the neighborhood, as well as the participants’ awareness of existing social capital. These included a broad question asking participants to list any and all assets they could think of and more narrowly constructed questions about skills and abilities that they or their neighbors might offer the neighborhood as an asset, or human capital. A questionnaire would have been a limited tool
to assess whether the workshop helped participants to develop social capital, and as a result, the questionnaire only asked participants to describe relationships or social networks with neighbors and community organizations; this essentially was a way of assessing awareness of social capital as an existing asset. Other questions explored the participants’ overall understanding of the nature or character of the neighborhood and its residents by asking why people live in Charlotte, what challenges the community faces, how the participants relate to their neighbors and on what subjects they believe they hold similar or disparate beliefs. The questions on the pre- and post-questionnaires were largely identical, but the post version included four additional questions that asked participants for general reflections on their experiences in the study. When answering post-questions that were identical to pre-questions, participants were asked to reflect on how their responses might have changed, or not changed, since completing the initial questionnaire.

A questionnaire identical to the pre-questionnaire was provided to 12 individuals who participated only in the charrette after they finished the event. This provided a control group to compare to the storytelling group, and a means of checking whether individuals who volunteered for the storytelling group differed from other charrette participants. Questionnaires were provided to participants as Google Forms to be completed at their convenience. The link was distributed by email, the primary means of communication between myself and other participants in this project.

Questionnaire responses also were instrumental in developing post-interview guides to gather additional data on the outcomes of the storytelling exercise. These interviews, conducted in January and February 2018, provided a richer source of data than the questionnaires, including a means of further examining themes that emerged during the storytelling exercise and a face-to-face opportunity to check my own impressions of the exercise against those of the other participants. After reviewing questionnaire responses and a transcript of the storytelling workshop, I developed a semi-structured interview guide for interviews, with 14 questions asked
of every interviewee and a smaller set of individualized questions for each person. The latter group of questions included more specific queries meant to clarify my understanding of remarks the participants made during the workshop or to explore specific themes in greater depth. The shared questions included asking participants to reflect on their main impressions and recollections weeks after the storytelling event; why they thought certain stories or themes resonated with them; and what they learned that was new or challenged their thinking. These questions were designed to assess whether and how the exercise had helped participants to develop a more holistic or nuanced understanding of the community. Other questions asked how the storytelling experience differed from or was similar to the charrette; about the nature of any connections the subject made with other participants, as a way to assess social capital; and whether the experience informed their thinking about what an asset could be and what assets the neighborhood has available. Using a semi-structured interview guide provided the structure necessary to ensure that each interview covered themes identified in my early analysis, yet allowed flexibility to adapt the conversation to explore unanticipated themes and directions as they came up (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

4.4.2 Charrette review. CDCR collects and scans all sketches, maps and notes created by charrette participants, and develops a report that transcribes these materials item-by-item, along with a narrative summary of key themes. This provided a wealth of material for comparison while analyzing the outcomes of the charrette and storytelling processes. I also participated in the charrette as one of 24 facilitators of subgroups which discussed various themes relating to neighborhood design and development. The subgroup topics were established in advance by the charrette steering committee. I led a group of six stakeholders who discussed transportation needs in the waterfront area. My notes from my experience leading this subgroup also were a source of data on the charrette and the themes that it explored.
4.4.3 Storytelling workshop. The centerpiece of this project was a group storytelling exercise, or workshop, designed for six to 10 stakeholders from a single neighborhood. I selected the group format because many of the potential benefits of the storytelling process described in the literature unfold in a setting where people share stories with others – a place where participants both construct stories for listeners, become listeners themselves, and have opportunities to reflect on one another’s perspectives (van Hulst, 2012). This type of setting exposes participants to differing perspectives on similar topics, creating the potential to develop a richer understanding of how their fellow stakeholders perceive the community in a way that would be impossible during a one-on-one interview with a researcher. There also is greater capacity to explore social capital or discussion of assets in a group setting. Public, group storytelling exercises may potentially play a role in fostering an engaged citizenry (Beauregard, 2003). Small groups also were used in case studies examined for this paper, including a community storybook project (Pstross et al., 2014) and a participatory storytelling event conducted for community development research (Little & Froggett, 2010).

The size of the group was based in large part on focus group literature. While the storytelling literature suggests that groups are valuable, it offers limited guidance on optimal sizes. While this group did not function as traditional focus group, the literature makes clear that groups of this size can serve as a primary means of data collection, particularly in combination with individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). Typically, focus groups have six to 10 participants, a number that is conducive to group conversations. With fewer than six participants, it can be difficult to sustain a discussion, while more than 10 can be difficult to manage (Morgan, 1997). Case studies in the storytelling literature also support the use of groups of similar size (Pstross et al., 2014; Lau & Seedat, 2014).

The format of the storytelling exercise was driven by Eckstein’s concept of the planner’s responsibility to follow the traditional storyteller’s role of making an “amiable narrative and physical space for stories to be heard” (2003, p. 21). To accomplish this, the format borrowed
elements of the restorative circle, an approach that emphasizes mutual concern and respect, the opportunity for all to tell their own stories without interruption, and deep listening (Greenwood, 2005). This way of speaking, or restorative dialogue, draws on the indigenous tradition of the talking circle. Specifically, each participant had the opportunity to respond to prompts from the facilitator uninterrupted for up to three minutes; as facilitator, I enforced this time limit loosely to avoid making participants feel that they were “on the clock” while speaking. Participants also were free to choose not to respond to any prompt without having to explain why. As facilitator, I also provided a brief description of generative listening (Hanlon & Rigney, 2011), and encouraged participants to try to set aside thoughts about how they would prepare to respond to the prompt or react to other participants’ stories, and to attempt to slow down and listen deeply and openly to one another.

The exercise used four open-ended prompts meant to encourage participants to share stories on particular topics, as well as two open-response rounds where participants were invited to reflect on each other’s stories. While this approach did not entirely adhere to the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2013), it borrowed techniques from BNIM that are designed to induce narratives. This includes the use of open response questions and allowing the subject to respond without interruption. In the exercise, participants were asked to respond to the first two story prompts, followed by a less structured response round in which they were asked to reflect on what they learned by listening to others’ stories, as well as whether anything they heard had especially resonated with or challenged them. The response rounds offered opportunities to explore whether participants were developing a more holistic or nuanced understanding of the community or developing a level of comfort that could lead to building social capital. Following the initial response round, two more questions followed, after which a final response round took place. Based on the group dynamics, I allowed the response rounds to depart from the restorative circle format, in that participants were invited to respond...
directly to one another. This dynamic encouraged a freer exchange of reflections, with some facilitation to minimize tangents and ensure that no one dominated the exchange.

After each prompt was introduced, I allowed a brief silence for participants to reflect on the topic before responding. The four central prompts were as follows.

- **Please share a story about a place of particular importance to you in Charlotte.**
  This question was meant to prompt reflection on assets, as well as varied or competing values, assumptions and meanings assigned to shared spaces. It also was intended to begin the conversation around a place of resonance or emotion for the storytellers, in hopes of encouraging an open and empathetic exchange during the remainder of the workshop.

- **Please share a story about an urban myth or legend about Charlotte.** This question also was intended to generate discussion about assets through the lens of misperceptions about the neighborhood. By asking participants to call out these misperceptions, I hoped to provide an opportunity to describe what they believed the correct narrative to be. This was a way to correct the record, and in the process of reversing or debunking a myth, to identify misunderstood or overlooked assets.

- **Please share a story about an incident, person or organization that made a lasting impact on your neighborhood during your lifetime.** This question was meant to elicit stories that might identify people, human capital or organizations as assets, and to explore social connections and support systems that are important to the neighborhood.

- **Please share a story about Charlotte’s future.** This question was meant to give participants an opportunity to formulate visions for the future, clarify their hopes for the community, and flesh out values and assumptions about the neighborhood. My hope was that responses to the earlier questions would help to shape the visions that people
shared, perhaps reflecting a more expansive understanding of opportunities, challenges and assets in the community.

4.4.4 Collaborative narrative. The written narrative served three purposes. First, I agreed to provide CDCR and the community steering committee a short report or summary of the event and my findings as a potential resource to guide future planning efforts. Second, the narrative was a vehicle for continued data collection on the outcomes of the storytelling exercise, providing participants an opportunity to call attention to themes or dynamics that I might have overlooked. Finally, the report was a method to ground truth my analysis of stories shared during the event. Participants were asked to review a draft of the narrative and provide feedback and edit as they saw fit, with light editing for spelling, grammar and length. This collaborative process was conducted by email for convenience. This element of the project also was intended to respond to Sandercock and Attili’s (2010) call for collaborative planning that creates an ongoing dialogue between the planner and community residents. Participants were asked to decide whether they wished for their contributions to be credited by name in the summary or appear anonymously.
5 ANALYSIS

5.1 Types of data

The results of data collection included:

- Pre- and post-exercise questionnaires completed by the storytelling group participants;
- Post-charrette questionnaires completed by participants in the charrette only;
- A transcript of the storytelling workshop;
- A full charrette report from CDCR;
- My own notes from the charrette;
- Transcripts of one-on-one interviews;
- A collaborative narrative developed with participants;
- Emails from participants on the collaborative narrative.

5.2 Approach to analysis

This project employed a template approach to thematic analysis to identify and code themes in the materials described above. Thematic analysis is an accepted approach in narrative inquiry, and has similarities to grounded theory and interpretive phenomenological analysis (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis focuses on identifying the thematic meaning of the content in a narrative, rather than on the form in which the narrative is delivered. Content refers to what a story is about, what was told, why, when, where and by whom; once a researcher identifies themes in the content, they generally are grouped into broader categories for further interpretation (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2017). Categories might be used to identify which themes are responsive to which research questions. The template approach to this type of analysis refers to developing a preliminary template of a priori themes to seek in the data, which are then revised and refined as the analysis is under way (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thematic codes are typically developed from a combination of established theory and in
vivo, or codes that the researcher expects to emerge based on his or her own background and familiarity with the topic, subjects and format (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Thematic analysis was particularly appropriate for this project, which deals primarily with collecting and exploring information conveyed through narratives. This approach provided a systematic way to identify and refine themes in the participants’ narratives. This approach also provided a consistent framework for identifying or measuring information responsive to my research questions. For example, to understand whether a participant had developed a more nuanced or holistic understanding of the neighborhood, I would need to identify and compare themes in their responses to the pre-questionnaires, the storytelling prompts and post-interviews to note shifts in his or her understanding, or a broader, more expansive understanding of the community. These might be themes in which the respondent during a post-interview straightforwardly acknowledged learning something new about the neighborhood during the workshop. But these also might include themes that suggested a shift in perception that the participant did not directly acknowledge, requiring further exploration in post-interviews. Thematic analysis was particularly helpful in approaching the latter scenario, in which changes in the participants’ thinking might otherwise go unrecognized.

Participants’ understanding of assets could be analyzed with a similar comparison of themes, noting changes among the pre-questionnaires, remarks at the exercise, and the post-interviews. To understand differences or similarities between my exercise and the charrette, I also would need to identify and compare themes in the charrette report and my charrette notes to those from the storytelling workshop.

Thematic analysis was perhaps less critical to my exploration of social capital. While it was important to document themes of participants expressing trust or connection during the exercise as part of this analysis, the storytelling workshop was not designed to elicit responses about whether the participants felt they were developing social capital, and so themes on this topic were limited during the event itself. It seemed important to allow participants time to reflect
on or develop any connections they made after the event, and to design post-interview questions as the main tool for assessing the extent of social capital at a later date. This portion of the analysis was based more in direct conversation about relationships than an examination of themes discussed during the workshop.

I developed an initial set of themes (Table 1) to begin analyzing the data, starting with the storytelling workshop transcript, then moving in order to the questionnaires, post-interviews, charrette report and my charrette notes. This approach allowed me to develop an initial set of findings before comparing the storytelling event to the charrette in order to identify how the two exercises differed and overlapped thematically. The initial set of themes was based largely on my recollection and notes about the data and how it might relate to my research questions after a weeks-long process of immersing myself in the data (Nowell et al., 2017) as I transcribed audio, read through transcripts and re-listened to audio recordings of both the event and post-interviews.

Many of these initial themes, however, proved to be too narrow, while others were too broad. For example, I originally set out to note themes that identified different types of assets in order to identify information responsive to my research question on this topic. But this approach failed to address the storytelling participants’ discussion of how and why these assets were meaningful to them – perhaps one of the richest sources of data that the exercise yielded, and which would later prove to be responsive to my research question about developing a more nuanced or holistic understanding of the community. I was initially too narrowly focused on identifying types of assets without considering themes that addressed how and why the assets mattered. I also found that I was looking for certain themes prematurely; while I originally planned to note when participants spoke during the storytelling workshop about having learned something new or had their way of thinking challenged, there were relatively few instances where this occurred. Instead, participants often reflected on how their thinking changed mainly during the post-interviews. Some of my initial themes also functioned better as broader
categories, indicating which themes were responsive to which research questions, rather than tools to identify and organize the basic content within each piece of data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category: Assets</th>
<th>Category: Social capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places of cultural/historic significance</td>
<td>Expression of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places that allow community gathering/connection</td>
<td>Expression of feeling a sense of connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources as attractions to visitors</td>
<td>Expression of leveraging social networks for one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources as stakeholder’s connection to natural world</td>
<td>Follow-up contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources as connection to personal/family history</td>
<td>Follow-up gathering/meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources as ecologically important</td>
<td>Follow-up conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as sources of local knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as sources of social support</td>
<td><strong>Category: Nuanced/holistic understanding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as components of social networks</td>
<td>Expression of challenge to way of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as advocates for community</td>
<td>Expression of learning, retaining new information/experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as sources of political capital</td>
<td>Expression of making space for new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals as sources of labor/help to neighbors</td>
<td>Expression of changing way of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations as sources of social capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations as sources of organizational capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations as sources of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations as advocates for neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address these problems, I continued to use my initial themes as a general guide, but I began open coding as I encountered thematic information that I had not anticipated. I also tried to simplify my themes and to code in the simplest topical terms possible, merely identifying the basic subjects that each phrase addressed, without initially considering whether or how the theme tied back to my research questions. This allowed me to develop a foundational sense of the thematic content of each piece of data, to then observe patterns in how often themes came
up across various pieces of data, and to begin categorizing them into larger categories that indicated which themes were responsive to which research questions (Table 2). For example, if a speaker described walking among the trees in the river gorge and feeling a spiritual connection to nature, I noted that the speaker had spoken about the river gorge and had touched on two themes: a general connection with nature or wilderness, and a sense of spiritual connection that had been facilitated by this contact with nature. References to the work of the Charlotte Community Association (or CCA), the primary neighborhood group in Charlotte, were coded for a theme on strong neighborhood organizations. In both cases, I then categorized references to the river gorge and CCA as assets, and references to the value of nature, spiritual connection and strong neighborhood organizations as value or services provided by these assets. This helped me to separate the identification of assets from discussion of their value, which were distinct types of information. I then considered how groups of themes and categories related back to my research questions.

The assets category is straightforward, while themes under the value and services category connected to the questions on holistic understanding and the charrette; it became clear when comparing value and service themes across all the data that the storytelling workshop at times yielded very different themes than the charrette, for example. Myths and perceived challenges also spoke to the research questions about holistic understanding and the charrette; in post-interviews, several participants indicated that they heard about some perceived challenges for the first time during the storytelling workshop, indicating this was information they had not heard during the charrette and that it had shaped their understanding of how their neighbors perceive and experience life in the neighborhood.

I also found that the responses to each prompt during the storytelling workshop required different approaches to categorization. Responses to the first question, which asked participants to share a story about a place of importance to them, tended to not only produce themes on assets, but why and how various places in the neighborhood were assets and what direct
benefits or services they provided to the storyteller. Meanwhile, the third question, which asked participants to share stories about organizations, people or events that had shaped the neighborhood in some significant way, led to responses more straightforwardly categorized into different types of assets. By contrast, responses to the second question, which invited participants to identify and correct urban myths about their neighborhood, yielded themes divided into two separate sets of categories. The first was a set of themes about apparent myths and misperceptions; responses to these misperceptions; and assets identified through the process of debunking myths (which I included under the main asset category). The second set of categories dealt with responses that were not entirely responsive to the question, but instead dealt with places, people or groups that the respondents perceived as actual negative influences in the neighborhood. In some cases, other participants challenged these perceptions. The result was a set of contested themes that substantively differed from those aired by participants who directly addressed the urban myth question.

Table 2. A Posteriori Categories and Themes for Storytelling Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category: Values/services provided by assets</th>
<th>Category: Assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual connection via contact with nature</td>
<td>Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of connection to larger neighborhood/community</td>
<td>Holy Cross Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to arts/culture</td>
<td>Lake Ontario/Genesee River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to personal history/identity</td>
<td>Ontario Beach Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to a tight-knit social group</td>
<td>River gorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to nature/wilderness</td>
<td>Turning Point Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to family/family history</td>
<td>Charlotte Community Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to community's past/knowledge of history</td>
<td>Northwest Neighborhood Service Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to emotional processing/comfort</td>
<td>Abbott's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to opportunity for reflection/introspection</td>
<td>Neighborhood advocates/activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to mental &quot;recharge&quot;</td>
<td>Community elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for new beginning</td>
<td>Helpful/friendly neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism/advocacy</td>
<td>Bartenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting neighbors to each other/resources</td>
<td>Public servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubbornness/resistance to outside threats</td>
<td>Elected leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness to residents</td>
<td>Youth/students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduit for community information</td>
<td>Category: Myths/misperceptions about Charlotte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional knowledge</td>
<td>Misunderstood/mischaracterized by outsiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to protect private property</td>
<td>Rough/unsafe reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public access to water/nature</td>
<td>Overdeveloped/lacking green space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood preservation</td>
<td>Unwelcoming to people of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness/empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category: Visions for future</td>
<td>Welcoming, helpful community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for year-round activity</td>
<td>Unrecognized/unexplored resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Organic&quot; development that protects character</td>
<td>Charlotte is more economically diverse than perceived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of protecting public access to water</td>
<td>Connection to nature/wilderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More pedestrian-friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More arts/culture/entertainment</td>
<td>Category: Perceptions of actual problems in Charlotte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More civic engagement</td>
<td>Charlotte's past/history unexplored/unacknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More highlights of neighborhood history</td>
<td>Lack of voice in key decisions about neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More small businesses</td>
<td>Unclear brand/identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More outdoor/estuary education</td>
<td>Crime/safety as threat to neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalize underused buildings</td>
<td>Certain renters not invested/a source of crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More regional cooperation in recreational activities</td>
<td>Outside youth as source of crime/safety issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for community brand/identity</td>
<td>Unwelcoming to people of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More diversity</td>
<td>Need to keep out &quot;rifraf&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category: Concerns about future</td>
<td>Category: Counterpoints to perceptions of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of displacement</td>
<td>Racism or stereotyping underlie renter/youth concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential impact of climate change</td>
<td>Need to integrate renters, youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-control development</td>
<td>Racial problems are national, not rooted here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining healthy waterways</td>
<td>Youth as an untapped asset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing an initial set of themes for the storytelling workshop transcript early in the analytic process also was instrumental in developing the post-interview guides for further analysis. It quickly became apparent while developing a priori codes that it would be difficult or impossible to identify whether participants developed or enhanced social capital during the workshop through thematic analysis of the transcript alone. This made clear that it would be important to ask questions during post-interviews to assess the extent to which participants made connections with each other, and to explore the nature of these connections. As a result, six of the 14 common questions on the post-interview guide dealt with social capital.

Many initial themes dealt with identifying and defining assets. For example, after noting frequent references to Lake Ontario, the Genesee River and the river gorge as assets, I identified themes on natural resources as attractions to visitors, natural resources as points of connection to the natural world, natural resources as connections to personal or family histories, and natural resources as important elements of life-sustaining local or regional ecosystems. Other responses identified individuals as assets, and I developed initial codes that categorized people as sources of local knowledge, neighborhood advocacy, social support, connection to other residents and political capital. Built structures were recognized as assets because they held cultural or historic significance, allowed community gathering and interaction, or provided some other type of community service. Social capital was identified largely through expressions of comfort or each in sharing with and listening to others involved in the storytelling exercise, expressions of trust or empathy (“I understand,” “I relate”), plans to speak with or see other participants in the future, or expressions of feeling that participants could reach out to one another in the future if they needed advice or help.

After beginning to code transcripts and questionnaires using qualitative data analysis software, I ultimately found it was more productive for me to print out materials and code manually with a pen and a highlighter. I then typed themes into spreadsheets and used the pivot table function in Microsoft Excel to count the number of times participants referenced each
theme. This process helped me to spot redundancies and unclear phrasing in the themes that I initially identified, and to identify opportunities to consolidate, refine or reorganize themes. This process also helped me to spot instances of themes that I had missed while examining the text, but recalled from reading through the transcripts. I typically went through two to four iterations of refining themes for each question from the workshop and each question in the post-interviews. My use of pivot tables may give the mistaken impression that I attempted to use a quantitative approach in what is fundamentally qualitative research. To be clear, my intent was not to explore or assign statistical meaning to the counts generated through this process. Rather, pivot tables were an organizational and analytical tool, and a way to make general observations about which themes received greater emphasis than others.
6 FINDINGS

6.1 Participant enrollment

Efforts to recruit participants for the storytelling workshop on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2017 yielded 15-20 verbal and written inquiries or expressions of interest. Roughly half those who inquired had scheduling conflicts, did not follow up to register in advance, or were ineligible (for example, one individual responded to an event flyer, but had not participated in the charrette). Eight people pre-registered and attended; an additional five walk-ins participated as well. Most had either spoken with me directly about this project or heard me speak at the charrette about the workshop, and had at some point expressed interest, but had not pre-registered.

While recruiting participants, I made efforts to pre-register a roughly equal number of men and women from a mix of races, ethnicities and age groups to at least approximately mirror Charlotte’s demographics. Certainly the focus group could not be expected to be representative of the broader community, but I hoped to ensure at least somewhat diverse perspectives during the workshop. I mainly did this by making a conscious effort to stay in touch with men and women of color who approached me with interest in the workshop to provide information, offer to answer any questions they might have, and encourage them to pre-register if they were interested. Altogether, the group included eight women and five men, ranging in age from people in their 30s to their 80s. The group included two women of color, while a majority of other participants were White. Two married couples also were among the participants. Five participants had been integrally involved in planning the charrette as members of the community steering committee. One participant arrived late and missed the first question, but participated fully in the remainder of the workshop.
6.2 Pre-workshop assessment

This project includes a control group and an intervention group. Twelve individuals who participated only in the CDCR-led charrette completed questionnaires after that event, serving as the control group. Ten of the 13 people who participated in both the charrette and storytelling workshop also completed questionnaires after the charrette, and before the storytelling exercise. This allowed me to assess what assets people in the storytelling group already could identify in the neighborhood and how their views compared to stakeholders who had also been part of the same participatory planning process; if there were differences between the intervention and control groups, it would be important to understand how they differed in order to accurately interpret the outcomes of the storytelling exercise.

Analysis of the questionnaires revealed some noteworthy differences between the two groups. In response to the first question on the questionnaire, which asked respondents to list any and all assets they could think of in Charlotte, the most common responses for the control group were general references to the waterfront or port area, and to specific public parks and properties in the neighborhood (Table 3). This was followed in prevalence by references to Lake Ontario or the Genesee River; the perceived quiet and safety of the neighborhood; and general references to residents engaged in or passionate about civic life. Among storytelling participants, there were a number of similarities – parks and open spaces also were among the most frequent themes for this group, as were references to the lake and river. Yet unlike the control group, the intervention group did not make general references to the port or waterfront area. Instead, some of the storytelling participants referred more specifically to underutilized public facilities in the port area, including the former Port of Rochester ferry terminal building, which has not housed a ferry service since 2006 and is now occupied by a boater services area, a handful of seasonal restaurants, and rooms for event rentals and public meetings. Some intervention group members referred to aspects of the port or waterfront area in a more specific way than many of those in the control group, including references to the pier at Ontario Beach.
Park on the lakefront. Specific local businesses also were more often cited as assets by some members of the storytelling group, but not the control group. The intervention group also listed specific neighborhood groups more frequently.

**Table 3. Comparison of Control and Intervention Group Themes, Pre-Questionnaire #1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset themes</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Intervention Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public parks</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific local businesses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port area in general</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Ontario or Genesee River</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet/safety of the community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underutilized public facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village/small-town character</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public access to waterfront</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar differences emerged in other responses. The second question asked respondents to list assets that individual people or neighbors offer the neighborhood (Table 4). The control group most often listed in general terms civically engaged residents, and friendly or helpful neighbors. The storytelling group also cited civic engagement as an asset, but some of its respondents focused on more specific themes, including qualities of individual business owners, activists, public servants and volunteers, and provided more extensive responses.

**Table 4. Comparison of Control and Intervention Group Themes, Pre-Questionnaire #2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset themes</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Intervention Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteerism/civic engagement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government or business knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborliness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term investment in neighborhood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third question asked respondents to reflect on skills or talents they offer their neighborhood; common responses for the control group included friendliness with neighbors, acting as community connectors (or finding ways to connect residents with each other or to useful resources) and civic engagement. For the storytelling group, civic engagement was by far the most common theme, followed by communication skills, leadership and planning skills, and historic knowledge about the neighborhood. The groups also differed on the types of challenges that the neighborhood faces, with the storytelling group placing more emphasis on unsafe traffic conditions and pedestrian safety; the charrette-only group focused more on a perceived need for development and jobs.

The sample size of both the control and intervention groups is limited, and this analysis makes no attempt to determine statistical significance in the differences between responses from the control and intervention groups. Nonetheless, the differences in results suggest a few reasonable conclusions. First, the participants in the storytelling workshop were a self-selected subgroup of charrette participants who chose voluntarily to take part in an additional exercise. This may indicate they are in some ways atypical of other charrette participants, the vast majority of whom chose not to join an additional exercise. As noted above, five of the 13 storytelling participants were members of the steering committee that planned the charrette. They spent considerable time over several months exploring and discussing the neighborhood’s strengths and weaknesses – an experience that could be expected to give them a different perspective than other charrette participants. It may then be unsurprising that these individuals would readily name more specific places and people of importance to the neighborhood, or be able to recognize communication skills as an essential asset after spending months working to promote and explain the charrette. The steering committee also worked on outreach to local businesses to involve them in the planning effort, likely giving its members more specific knowledge of the neighborhood’s economic base and individual business owners.
Lastly, a number of the participants in the storytelling group also are actively involved in community groups such as the CCA and the advocacy group Charlotte Strong. This all makes clear that any interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data must consider that the storytelling group was at least partly made up of individuals who are already active, engaged and networked with other stakeholders in the neighborhood, and appear to have more specific knowledge and impressions of the neighborhood’s assets and challenges.

6.3 Workshop analysis

The storytelling workshop was held on a Saturday morning at the Charlotte Branch Library in Rochester. Because the group was slightly larger than anticipated, the exercise was longer than the anticipated 90 minutes, lasting a little more than 2 hours. Using BNIM and generative listening principles discussed above, I asked participants to sit in a circle facing one another. We sat around two small tables pushed together to give participants a place to rest beverages and snacks provided for the event. The discussion opened with each participant briefly introducing her or himself, after which I briefly discussed consent forms for participants; summarized the research project; and reviewed the format of the facilitated discussion. Without referring directly to the term “generative listening” (Hanlon & Rigney, 2011), I asked participants to try to listen deeply and openly to one another without focusing on their own reactions or responses.

Below, I summarize the responses to each prompt and then discuss major themes and categories that emerged from these responses. I summarize topics in the order that they came up in the group, as respondents sometimes built on one another’s responses - for example, more than one person sometimes listed the same asset, but then described why it was important to him or her in ways that echoed or contrasted with reasons described by another participant.
6.3.1 Prompt 1: Please share a story about a place of particular importance to you in Charlotte. Participants identified several locations in Charlotte that could be considered assets. Each speaker then described how and why these places were important to them. These included:

- **Holy Cross Catholic Church:** This Gothic-style, stone church is a major landmark on Lake Avenue, the main commercial corridor in Charlotte (Figure 3). The main church building and a related school dominate much of a city block. The main church building was constructed in 1881 (Holy Cross Church, 2012). Two participants, a married couple, attend the church as parishioners and described it as a place to reconnect with neighbors they do not often see during the rest of the week. One of these participants described Holy Cross parishioners as “a very close-knit group.” The church also held significance for the couple’s family; their children were baptized and married there.

**Figure 3. Holy Cross Church**
Turning Point Park: This 275-acre city-owned park is located along the banks of the Genesee River, a little more than two miles south of where the river enters Lake Ontario (City of Rochester, n.d.). One of its most recognizable characteristics is an elevated boardwalk that winds along the river's edge (Figure 4) and forms part of the Genesee Riverway Trail, which terminates at the lake. Two participants spoke about the park.

○ One woman described positive childhood memories of the park, which she visited once or twice a month with her parents. She described it as a place to enjoy the outdoors before it got too cold, a reference to Rochester’s long winters.

○ A man described taking his dogs to the park to let them run off-leash. He said he took particular interest in the ruins of industry along the river banks, including old building foundations. These foundations are partially hidden beneath overgrown vegetation, he said, but his dogs find them while exploring.

Figure 4. Turning Point Park
● “The water”: Four participants spoke about bodies of water in Charlotte in general, without specifying a particular place on the water (Figure 5):
  ○ A woman who grew up in the Rochester area and recently moved to Charlotte from New York City said that views of the water are important to her. She enjoys walking near the water. Referring to a long pier that extends into Lake Ontario from Ontario Beach Park, a city-owned park on the waterfront, she said: “I don’t know anyplace else where you can go out so far into the middle of the water and turn around 360 degrees and gasp and gasp and gasp at the beauty.” She also described the lake as a place where she goes to think and find perspective. At the pier, “I’ve probably ironed out every significant part of my life,” she said. She described the pier as “essential to my mental health.”

**Figure 5. Pier at Ontario Beach Park**
Another woman said she had enjoyed living near the waterfront on both sides of the river – Charlotte on the western side today, and previously in the suburb of Irondequoit on the eastern side of the river. She drew a distinction between the two places, noting that she was familiar with the water from “the other side.” She said she enjoyed observing shifts in the direction of the wind at the beach and looking at the water year-round (“I even love looking at it in the winter”).

A woman who grew up in the Rochester area said she recently moved to Charlotte after living many years out of state. She noted that her parents are buried in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery along the border between Charlotte and the city’s Maplewood neighborhood. She described her return to Charlotte as a “God walk,” and the start of a new life. She ascribed spiritual significance to this new beginning. “I left everything behind and came here, and I’ve never been this happy in my life,” she said. She described frequently walking the boardwalk and pier, and recalled driving to Charlotte as a child with her father to fish off the end of the pier. She took a similar trip to the end of the pier with her granddaughter shortly before the workshop.

A woman said she grew up in a town west of Rochester, but often visited the beach in Charlotte during summers. Later in life, she lived in a rural town west of Rochester on Lake Ontario. This was a “very painful part of my life,” during which she loved being near the water, she said. Her home today in Charlotte backs up to the Genesee River gorge (Figure 6). She began to cry while describing the gorge. “It’s all woods behind me, and I love living there. I love the land, the river. I’m sorry to get emotional because it just – it’s a good emotion. I love the land. I talk to the trees, I talk to the water, the river, the ground that I’m walking on, the history.” She said she loves that the river and lake meet in Charlotte.
Figure 6. Portion of the Genesee River gorge in Turning Point Park.

- **Ontario Beach Park:** This is a 39-acre city-owned park on Lake Ontario in Charlotte. It includes a sandy beach, a gazebo for concerts, a historic carousel and picnic/barbecue shelters for rental (Figure 7). One participant described taking summer childhood trips to Abbott’s, a frozen custard shop across the street from the park, and then walking along the beach with her mother and siblings. These trips were “a key part of my childhood growing up.” She said her world was “not very big” as a child, as her parents were from Charlotte, and both her grandmothers still lived there at the time. “In a world where we talk about bubbles, this is one bubble that I don’t mind,” she said. Her family later moved to a suburb; as an adult, she lived in a major city before moving back recently, after which she realized she had missed the beach. “Every positive and negative thing, or mental health time, has happened with me at the beach, walking the pier or walking
along the boardwalk.” The participant recalled a trip to the park with her grandmother after her grandfather died; the children rode the carousel together several times.

Figure 7. Ontario Beach Park

- **Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse**: The lighthouse was constructed in 1822 and is the oldest active surviving lighthouse on Lake Ontario (Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Society, 2017) (Figure 8). A man described his time volunteering at the lighthouse. He began collecting postcards of historic scenes in Charlotte, and later visited the lighthouse to see a display about Ontario Beach. He noted that he had more pictures of the park than the lighthouse society. A woman running the lighthouse gift shop urged him to volunteer. “That was like, 28 years ago,” he said. “So I get to share all the
wonderful things that you guys are talking about with people from all over the country.” He recalled also meeting people from around the world and having his picture taken with a family from Pakistan. He said he shares stories about life in Charlotte, including “the good stuff and the bad.” As a child, Turning Point Park also was a place of importance to him. “In different phases of my life, it was different places, but they all mean a lot to me, and I can’t imagine being away from them.”

**Figure 8. Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse**

Two participants more generally described stories of how they first connected with the neighborhood as a whole, rather than discussing a particular place within it. One said he became acquainted with Charlotte when he moved to Rochester in the late 1960s and “used to
hang out at the beach with the girls.” He said he often wondered why the neighborhood was not more developed as an entertainment and recreation area. He later lived outside the city, but moved back in recent years from a neighboring suburb, joking that he was an illegal immigrant. Neighbors helped get him involved in the neighborhood group, the CCA.

Another participant said he first started coming to the waterfront area to get involved with the choir at Holy Cross. He later became involved with the Charlotte Strong community group, which arose largely in opposition to the most recent development project planned for city-owned land on the waterfront (Sharp, 2014). The man began researching the geology of the neighborhood and river basin, and said he discovered that the city government had a variety of information that showed it was not a good idea to build on the waterfront due to its geology and the depth of the bedrock. He then generally described the geology of the lake area and noted that the lake level is slowly rising on the south side of Lake Ontario.

6.3.2 Themes from Prompt 1. The lake, river and lakefront park emerged as critical assets to many participants during responses to the first prompt. While residents identified at least six distinct places in the neighborhood as sites of importance to them, Ontario Beach Park and the two bodies of water in Charlotte were cited most often. Eight distinct themes connected to Ontario Beach Park, more than any other place that the participants listed. The framing of the question appeared to be helpful in focusing respondents on their own reasons for valuing these places, many of which were deeply emotional or personal, rather than on how or why these places might hold value for the broader neighborhood as a whole.

I identified 14 themes that emerged during Prompt 1, most of which dealt with services or benefits that various places, or assets, provided to neighborhood residents (Table 5). The most common themes dealt with the sense of connection respondents felt to nature, wilderness or the beauty of the outdoors while spending time in particular places. Just as prevalent were themes about connections to the participants’ families, or to their own personal histories or
narratives of their lives. In several cases, the beach, the river and the lake were described more specifically as places that allowed participants to process difficult emotions or find emotional comfort, or to engage in reflection and introspection, or to mentally “recharge.”

Table 5. Themes on Places of Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse</th>
<th>Holy Cross Church</th>
<th>Lake Ontario/Genesee River</th>
<th>Ontario Beach Park</th>
<th>River gorge</th>
<th>Turning Point Park</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection to nature/wilderness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to personal history/identity</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to emotional processing/comfort</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to reflection/introspection</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to community past/history</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to neighbors/community</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to a tight-knit social group</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to mental “recharge”</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to visitors/a larger community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for new beginning</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to arts/culture</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other themes reflected that participants valued places that connected them to the neighborhood’s history and to other Charlotte residents, or provided some type of spiritual or religious experience. Less prominent themes focused on places that provided connections or opportunities to share neighborhood life with visitors from outside Charlotte; provided an opportunity to begin a new life; or provided access to arts and music. On a broader level, the responses to Prompt 1 can be categorized into themes about assets that help Charlotte residents to find connections to nature or natural resources; to family or personal history and narratives; to mental, emotional or spiritual reflection; to neighbors; to visitors; and to arts and music.
6.3.3 Prompt 2: Please share a story about an urban myth or legend about the neighborhood. After hearing the prompt, a participant asked for an example of an urban myth. I declined to offer a specific example, explaining that I did not want to steer the conversation in a particular direction, but I said there often are inaccurate perceptions of any neighborhood. I said that I was interested in hearing what myths exist about Charlotte, and what participants believed reality to be. Responses were a mix of urban myths and descriptions of what participants viewed as actual problems in the neighborhood. For the purposes of analysis, this section was coded along with the subsequent response round, which was almost entirely a continuation of a discussion that began during the answers to this prompt.

- “Rough” or unsafe: Three participants spoke about Charlotte’s “rough” reputation.
  - A man said he was unsure whether the reputation remains, but the neighborhood has been known as a “rough” place. He shared a story about going to an out-of-town college, where he met three men from a Rochester suburb. They asked where he went to high school; when he told them he went to Charlotte High School, they walked away from him, which he interpreted as rejection due to the neighborhood’s reputation. This perception of Charlotte is inaccurate, he said. “Actually, I think it’s a fairly warm place to live, that my neighbors are fun,” he said. “I say hi to people I don’t know on the street, just because hey, I don’t know them, maybe I should.”
  - Another participant said the beach is perceived as having problems with crime, particularly during the summer. “I’ve been here most of my life and I’ve never had a bad experience myself,” she said. “Granted, I’m just speaking for myself.” Limited instances of problems are used unfairly to characterize the entire area, she said. “I live in a neighborhood where people don’t lock their doors,” she said.
  - A woman who recently moved back to the neighborhood from out of state said that a friend warned her that it would be unsafe to buy a home in Charlotte,
particularly because she would be living there alone. “I had to call her every time I walked the boardwalk or went to a concert because she thought for sure I was never even going to make it home alive,” she said. The participant said this had not been her experience in Charlotte. “My neighbors, they are rock stars,” she said. “They have taken care of me … I’m not going to listen to myths.”

- Lack of green space/nature: Three participants described connections to nature that they felt many people overlook in a neighborhood perceived as largely suburban.
  - A participant said there is more access to the river gorge than many people realize, thanks in part to the river trail. She hikes in the area by Turning Point Park with her grandson in the winter and described seeing large cat and/or bear paw prints; she also described seeing fishers in her yard. She said she wakes up hearing the roars of lions at Seneca Park Zoo, which is across the Genesee River in Irondequoit, echoing through the gorge. “I think people, a lot of people are not really familiar with that, with the gorge as a living, breathing place.”
  - Another participant said that driving up Lake Avenue, Charlotte at a certain point looks very residential. “I think the perception is that Charlotte is kind of a community of houses, and almost suburban living within the city,” he said. “People are surprised when I tell them how much wildlife we see just strutting down our little street.” He shared anecdotes about deer, turkeys and coyotes walking through his yard, or seeing coyotes crossing Lake Avenue. The wildness of the gorge is deceptively close to Lake Avenue, he said.
  - Without addressing a particular myth, a participant described finding a home on nearly 2 acres in Charlotte - a rarity in the city - that backs up to the gorge. “I feel like I’m in the country when I walk out in my backyard.”
• **Racism:** Several participants discussed Charlotte’s reputation on race:
  
  o One woman said she believed that Charlotte has a reputation as unwelcoming to people of color, but as a resident of mixed race, she has not found that to be the case. She shared a story about working with a group that campaigned for a panel depicting a racial caricature to be removed from a historic carousel at Ontario Beach Park. City leaders agreed in 2016 to remove the panel – which showed a large rooster menacing two Black children – and it became a traveling museum exhibit, explaining its history as a pickaninny caricature meant to dehumanize black children (Riley, 2016). The participant said the fact that the image remained on the carousel for so long – the ride was constructed in 1905 – contributed to the perception that Charlotte is unwelcoming to people of color.
  
  o Responding to the previous speaker, another participant said he believes the neighborhood’s reputation on race has a historical basis in fact. The man, who was White, recalled riots over plans to bus Black students to Charlotte during the 1970s, when he was attending a middle school outside the neighborhood. “I think we’ve improved,” he said. “We probably still have a lot to go.” (For context, 58% of students in the Rochester City School District in 2016 were Black or African American, 28% were Hispanic, and 10% were White [New York State Department of Education, 2016]). The women who originally raised the topic noted that this type of racial tension was not unique to Charlotte at the time. Indeed, a three-day riot took place in other parts of Rochester in 1964 (Hare, 2014), and similar events occurred in cities across the country. She attributed the reaction from some White residents to busing to negative media coverage of Black communities in general. She said people have to work to learn more about one another’s similarities and differences.
Another remnant of Charlotte’s issues with race can be found in the persistent myth that students who attend a high school in the former Charlotte High School building (Figure 9) are “riffraff,” another participant argued, echoing a term that another member of the group used in reference to residents of a low-income housing complex. The woman said the Charlotte Community Association receives frequent complaints about students at the school, now called the Leadership Academy for Young Men, often simply because the students are standing around a bus stop. “Where else are they going to go? They’re kids,” she said.

Figure 9. Former Charlotte High School Building

- **Charlotte Strong as troublemakers**: A woman who had been involved with Charlotte Strong, a community group that formed to oppose a waterfront development project, said she felt the group had been misunderstood. People thought of the group as troublemakers, but did not realize the amount of behind-the-scenes work that members
did by writing to city and state leaders, attending City Council meetings, gathering nearly
3,000 signatures in opposition to the development project, and investigating the geology
of the site. She saw the end of the proposed project in 2016 and the recent charrette as
an outcome of Charlotte Strong’s work. “It gave the people of Charlotte a chance to
voice what they wanted,” she said. “They were bucking the city, and the city was a hundred percent against it.”

- **Unconfirmed ties to the Underground Railroad:** A participant described potentially unexplored connections to the Underground Railroad in the neighborhood. Rochester played a well-documented role in the abolition movement. Frederick Douglass lived in the city for more than 20 years and operated a newspaper, *The North Star*, from there; he is buried in Rochester’s Mount Hope Cemetery. The National Parks Service has recognized Kelsey Landing in Maplewood, a neighborhood immediately south of Charlotte, as a point where escaped slaves boarded boats bound for Canada via the Genesee River and Lake Ontario (Sharp, 2017). The workshop participant described other potential links, but lacking further investigation, these are for now unverified myths or stories, she said. Another participant shared the name of the city historian to contact about investigating further.

- **Upscale/wealthy suburb:** Three participants described perceptions of Charlotte as either upscale or wealthy and argued that this is an inaccurate view:
  - A participant said she’s heard from people who think of Charlotte as a suburb, rather than a part of the city, and an upscale area. The woman said she did not necessarily think being upscale is a bad thing, but that people who live in Charlotte might disagree or be aware of pockets that are not so upscale.
  - A woman said large lakefront mansions create the impression that Charlotte is populated by “rich white people.” She said that in fact, many people who lived in
Charlotte were blue collar workers at Eastman Kodak. Kodak’s headquarters in Rochester was a dominant employer in the city well into the 1990s (Hardy, 2015).

○ Another participant said the perception of wealth and privilege in Charlotte could be a remnant of the neighborhood’s history as a resort destination known as the Coney Island of the West. This period lasted from the 1870s to the early 1900s (CDCR, 2018). Later, the neighborhood was more heavily populated by immigrants seeking work at employers like an iron blast furnace, the participant noted (CDCR, 2018).

● Nothing to do: A participant said she is frustrated that people often think there is nothing to do in Charlotte. “Granted, in the winter, we’re struggling with the weather,” she noted. There is, however, a lot to do that is often overlooked, she said. “Maybe we have a branding problem,” she said. “I’m not sure, but I’ve never been bored living here.”

● Distance: Two participants said their friends live elsewhere in the city, and many are not willing to come to Charlotte because they perceive it as far away.

○ One woman said it took her only 15 minutes to get from downtown to the neighborhood that morning. “Nothing in Rochester is a long drive,” she said.

○ Another participant said a good friend of hers lives closer to the center city. “She said, ‘I’m not driving out there. You live in East Jesus, I’m not coming.’”

● Too much parking: A participant offered a defense of the large parking lots at the waterfront, saying they provide space for everyone to access and enjoy Charlotte. The large area occupied by parking lots was a subject of criticism during the charrette.

● Shared responsibility: One participant said many people outside Charlotte feel as though it is up to Charlotte residents alone to determine the neighborhood’s development and growth. In fact, the waterfront is a regional resource, and everyone in Monroe County has responsibility for its future, he said.
- **Buried geological features:** A man said many people are under the misconception that the mouth of the river is shallow and flat, while in fact sediment has filled in what used to be a large gorge. The bedrock is perhaps 150 feet deep at the Port of Rochester Terminal Building, he said.

**Snug Harbor:** Two participants spoke about an apartment complex in the neighborhood formerly known as Snug Harbor Court (Figures 10 and 11). They did not describe urban myths about the complex, but rather described it as a negative feature of the neighborhood. There is a documented history of issues at the complex. In 2015, the City of Rochester revoked a certificate of occupancy for the 110-unit complex and filed suit to compel its owners to address longstanding code violations (McDermott, 2015). The Rochester Housing Authority simultaneously notified 25 tenants receiving Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers that the agency would no longer provide rental assistance to live at Snug Harbor due to the deteriorated conditions there (McDermott, 2015).

The participants who spoke about the complex live nearby. One said the property is being rehabilitated by new owners, and “we’re really hoping that they screen their tenants better than they used to.” She said it was a site of frequent police calls and “rampant crime.” She described finding that plants which had been on her porch had been thrown in her neighbors’ yards, and she believed they might have been vandalized as part of a gang initiation. The other participant who discussed Snug Harbor said problems at the complex prompted neighbors to start a neighborhood watch group, but things have quieted now that few people live there. The new owner is investing in the property and will hopefully “upgrade the clientele” and keep out “the riffraff and the lowlifes and the drug addicts,” he said. He described talking to a police officer assigned to the neighborhood who told him that he dreaded coming into his shift sometimes because he knew he would be called to the complex two or three times in one night.
Figure 10. Former Snug Harbor Court Complex #1

Figure 11. Former Snug Harbor Court Complex #2
6.3.4 First response round. During the last few responses to the second question, the format of the workshop began to drift, with participants beginning to respond to one another rather than sharing stories one at a time. During the first response round, I said that this had seemed to occur organically, and if no one objected, I would encourage an open discussion during the response round. I asked participants to share what had resonated with them or challenged their thinking while listening to the other group members’ responses to the first two prompts.

- Race in reference to schools and Snug Harbor: There was continued discussion about perceived problems in the neighborhood and whether race played a factor in those perceptions. Conversation returned to the Leadership Academy for Young Men in the former Charlotte High School building. A participant who had earlier described problems at the Snug Harbor complex said there had been “legitimate concerns with the high school kids.” Many were bused into Charlotte from other parts of the city, he said. “They weren’t neighborhood kids, and they weren’t the best element that was coming here,” he said. Students would often cause trouble in the neighborhood, including shoplifting and fights, he said. He said it has since turned around, thanks to a “new, tough” principal.

Another participant shared a story about a trip on a public bus that was mainly taking students to the Leadership Academy for Young Men, but also accepted other passengers along its route. She said she boarded with her service dog and the students on the bus offered to help her with the dog and her bag; they also got up from the front seats to make room for her. “That whole bus, a full bus of boys, were very impressive to me,” she said. “I’m going to say probably 1% of them were causing all the trouble, and all the rest of them just got labeled with it.”

Another participant, a woman of color, said the term “bad element” is sometimes a code word for race. She also asked about the type of housing provided at the Snug Harbor complex. One of the participants who initially raised concerns about the complex noted that it had accepted tenants who received Section 8 and other forms of public
assistance. She said that in her experience as a property owner, some people who receive this type of income are good tenants, but others are not. The woman who asked the question said that it’s hard to balance the neighborhood’s concerns with avoiding stereotypes about everyone who lives in the complex. “It think it’s just worrisome just because, you know, people in the [social assistance] programs, they deserve to have a decent place to live as well. So we don’t necessarily want to kick them out, but we deserve to be safe and comfortable. So I think it’s tough trying to satisfy all parts of it.”

Another participant said that problems in the neighborhood stem from people who are not truly part of it. People who live in the neighborhood need to feel ownership. “If you really want to grow, you make everybody feel as though ‘this is my neighborhood, I have a stake in here, and therefore I’m going to invest my time, my free time, whatever it is, for all of us, you know? To make it better,” he said. A different participant suggested finding ways to better include people at places like Snug Harbor in the larger community, perhaps through the Community Association or an event like a community bazaar, “to show it's not us and them.” Another speaker said homeowners typically have more of a stake in investing in their properties and the neighborhood. That said, the neighborhood group is working to build partnerships with groups that might not feel like they are part of the community, including the Leadership Academy for Young Men and another public school in the neighborhood, said a speaker involved with the community association. The neighborhood needs more people to help with this effort, which could include getting students involved in neighborhood service projects, she said. The school choir sang recently at a neighborhood event. “It’s a way to integrate those students with the community,” she said.
6.3.5 Themes from Prompt 2 and first response round. The responses to the second prompt can be broadly divided into three categories. The first set of responses, and those most responsive to the original prompt, primarily identify myths about the neighborhood and then deal with refuting them. The second set deals with claims about negative influences in the neighborhood, rather than myths; these claims were then challenged by other group members. The third deals with unanswered questions or assumptions about the neighborhood, rather than myths or misperceptions.

Within the first category are two subsets of responses (Table 6). In the first subset, the respondent identified, debunked and ultimately reversed a myth to identify its subject as an asset rather than a liability for the neighborhood. This is a result that is consistent with ABCD, which focuses on identifying capacities in places where they are often overlooked or underestimated (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). For example, respondents who challenged the myth that Charlotte is a somewhat suburbanized and heavily residentially developed place ultimately reiterated the value of relatively wild and green spaces as assets to the neighborhood, a theme that also emerged in responses to the first prompt. The claim that Charlotte Strong is misunderstood as a group of troublemakers also was reversed to identify the group as an important asset that gave voice to a constituency that felt it lacked one.

Table 6. Myths Reversed to Reveal Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Asset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rough/unsafe reputation</td>
<td>Friendly, helpful community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbanized/lacking green space</td>
<td>Strong connection to nature/wilderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Strong as troublemakers</td>
<td>Charlotte Strong as voice for community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as source of problems</td>
<td>Students as an untapped asset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second subset, participants identified a myth and challenged its accuracy, but did not necessarily identify a particular asset during that process (Table 7). The myth of Charlotte’s
distance from other parts of the city falls into this subset; while participants rejected the notion that the neighborhood is somehow too distant to visit from other parts of the city, this particular myth seemed to offer little opportunity for the participants to identify an asset. Similarly, responses to the notion that Charlotte is a wealthy or upscale neighborhood refuted the myth, but did not go a step further to identify working class residents, for example, as an asset to the neighborhood. If the purpose of the prompt is to identify assets in a way that is consistent with ABCD, one potential way to avoid these split responses might be to ask respondents to share stories about positive aspects of the neighborhood that are often either mischaracterized or underappreciated, particularly by people who live outside Charlotte. This framing might focus the participants on misunderstood assets instead of more generally pushing back against perceptions with which they happen to disagree.

Table 7. Myths Refuted Without Identifying Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of wealth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant from rest of city</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing to do</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwelcoming to people of color</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the first category, the most prevalent theme was that Charlotte is misunderstood or unfairly mischaracterized by others outside the neighborhood, including both the friends and acquaintances of respondents and more powerful interests and institutions. The latter group included news media who report on crime in the neighborhood with little context, and a city government that in the view of at least one participant has given Charlotte residents too little say in key decisions about development in the community. Another key theme was that the neighborhood has underappreciated or unrecognized assets; these included friendly residents who look out for and support their neighbors, and the wilder portions of the river.
The second category incorporated contested themes that emerged as respondents spoke about their perceptions of problems in the neighborhood, rather than myths. This category also can be divided into two subgroups: themes that dealt with specific claims about Snug Harbor residents and students, and themes that dealt with broader questions about race in Charlotte (Table 8). In the first subgroup, two respondents raised themes of crime as a threat to safety and quality of life in the neighborhood; groups of renters perceived as undesirable and as a source of neighborhood problems; the need to better screen renters to keep undesirable tenants out of the neighborhood; and the need for a tougher discipline to address behavioral issues involving students from outside the neighborhood. Other participants challenged these themes with their own, including the potential that racism, stereotypes or overgeneralizations influenced perceptions about undesirable elements in the neighborhood. Some participants reversed themes about the perceived problems to identify the subjects of criticism as assets, with themes emerging about respectful and helpful students, and the perceived need to better integrate both renters and students into neighborhood activities and volunteer work.

Table 8. Contested themes about neighborhood myths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime/safety as threat to neighborhood</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain renters as source of crime/safety issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside youth as source of crime/safety issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renters not invested in neighborhood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to integrate renters, youth</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth as an untapped asset</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism or stereotyping underlie renter/youth concerns</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwelcoming to people of color</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood is welcoming to people of color</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial problems not unique to Charlotte</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the second subgroup under this category, respondents grappled with broader questions of whether Charlotte has been and is today welcoming to people of color. Themes included competing claims about whether racism has specific historic roots in the neighborhood and whether Charlotte is simply representative of larger national problems with race. Other themes included outright rejection of the perception of Charlotte as unwelcoming to people of color, while another theme touched on remnants of racism that may yet exist there.

The third category dealt with unexplored questions about the neighborhood, including potential connections to the Underground Railroad that have yet to be documented. It also touched on themes of unrecognized or underappreciated assets in Charlotte, misperceptions about the community from people who live outside it, and unexamined or lost history (Table 9).

Table 9. Other themes on perceived neighborhood problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood/mischaracterized from outside</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrecognized/unexplored resources</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of voice in key decisions about neighborhood</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear neighborhood brand/identity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexamined/lost history</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was one potential sign of social capital at work during this prompt. One participant provided another with the name and contact information for the city historian to discuss how to investigate potential ties to the Underground Railroad in Charlotte. This showed two participants developing social capital and using it to access other resources in the larger social network of the neighborhood and city.
6.3.6 Prompt 3: Please share a story about a person, incident or organization that made a lasting impact on your neighborhood during your lifetime. The group took a short break midway through the workshop. Afterward, I asked the participants to return to the original format of responding one by one, in part to keep the remainder of the workshop on schedule. In response to the third question, participants described a number of organizations and people who have had important impacts on the neighborhood:

- **Neighborhood organizations:** A woman said the Charlotte Community Association and the Maplewood Neighborhood Association had been “immensely helpful” in her effort to begin a tenants’ association at her apartment complex. She also said the City of Rochester’s Northwest Neighborhood Service Center helped connect her with the neighborhood groups. Bruce Wilder, assistant to the center’s administrator, helped the tenants’ group organize a cleanup of the Genesee Riverway Trail behind the apartment complex, she said.

- **Local businesses:** A participant said that Abbott’s Frozen Custard, which is across the street from Ontario Beach Park, had an important place in the neighborhood (Figure 12). She recalled taking her daughter’s family to the custard shop when they visited recently from out-of-state. “It’s a very small thing, but it was a really big deal that day,” she said.
Fellow residents and activists: Several participants cited individuals who led campaigns or improvement projects in the neighborhood, or held important knowledge about it:

- A man spoke about a late Charlotte resident, Bill Davis, who helped to start the group that saved the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse from being demolished. The U.S. Coast Guard decommissioned the lighthouse and turned it over to the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society in the 1980s (New York Historic, 2013). Davis also was instrumental in preventing development of Turning Point Park, the man said. “When you live your life like water, you go where there’s the least amount of resistance,” he said. “Bill was not the place you
went. So I think to a large extent, that park down at Turning Point Park and the lighthouse owe a huge debt to Bill.”

○ A participant credited another resident, Bob Stevenson, with advocating for the neighborhood and Turning Point Park, and for generally knowing a great deal of Charlotte history. In more general terms, the man said it is important to talk to elders in the community. “In terms of history of the area and things that have happened, and in general, I’m talking about any of the older folks,” he said. “Man, get their information before they pass on, because it’s just unbelievably valuable.”

○ A woman spoke about a former neighbor who started a neighborhood watch on their street and got her and her husband involved with the Charlotte Community Association.

○ A man recalled a former tenant “who became a close friend and almost a family member,” and who was a “watchdog” for his property.

○ A man said the bartenders at Mr. Dominic’s, a restaurant and bar in Charlotte, know a lot about the neighborhood. “If you’re a bartender, you know what’s going on,” he said. “So I guess the message is that veteran bartenders are your friend.”

○ A woman spoke about Jack Foy, a World War II veteran who served in the Battle of the Bulge. Foy founded a group for Battle of the Bulge survivors and helped to get a memorial to soldiers who fought there erected at Ontario Beach Park (Figure 13).
Figure 13. Battle of the Bulge Memorial at Ontario Beach Park

- **Public servants**: A woman shared a story about firefighters stationed at a firehouse in Charlotte. They frequently responded to calls at the home of her grandmother, who remained in her house in Charlotte until shortly before her death at the age of 101. “She had a lot of problems and they were there very frequently helping her out, transporting her,” the woman said. “And I know they were doing their job, but they did it in such a way
that they calmed her down, and she was very scared, and they were very personal, and they made the experience as best they could for her, and I appreciate that.”

- **Elected leaders:** Four participants credited Molly Clifford, a Rochester City Council member whose district includes Charlotte, for her work on the neighborhood’s behalf. Clifford “has been a huge advocate for this neighborhood” and “she’s just somebody who likes to bring people together to talk things out, understand each other,” a woman said. She also credited Clifford for saying she would not support the waterfront development proposal that ultimately failed in 2015. A second woman said Clifford pays attention to matters large and small. A third woman recalled getting a return phone call from Clifford at night to talk about an effort to put in a traffic signal at what is now an unsignalized crosswalk on Lake Avenue. A man said that after she was first elected, Clifford reached out to him after to discuss the waterfront development project, despite the fact that he had not supported her during the election.

Other participants spoke in more general terms about Lake Ontario as a force in shaping the neighborhood:

- A woman said she refers to the lake as “my best girlfriend ever.” “That’s the heart right there, Lake Ontario,” she said.

- Another woman reiterated her appreciation for the pier, describing it as an accessible place for all kinds of people. She recalled her mother taking her out on the pier during Hurricane Agnes and wrapping her in her coat to watch the storm. “Now, you know, she’s in her 90s, and I can take her to the beginning of the pier, because I know she only has to walk 10, 20 steps to see the water, and this was just a phenomenal thing.”

**6.3.7 Themes from Prompt 3.** This prompt led to a fairly straightforward inventory of assets in the neighborhood, but differed from Prompt 1 in that responses focused more on individuals, organizations and associations than on physical places or facilities (Table 10). Like Prompt 1,
participants’ stories established themes of how and why they believed these people and groups were impactful in the neighborhood. Prevalent reasons that individuals were cited as assets were activism and advocacy work, and acting as a community connector. Other themes were stubbornness or resistance in the face of outside threats against the neighborhood, and institutional or in-depth knowledge about life in Charlotte. Community organizations and individual activists were cited as assets in part because of their capacity to organize and accomplish tasks on the neighborhood’s behalf. Clifford was recognized, among other things, for responsiveness. Firefighters were valued in terms of kindness or empathy in their approach to helping a participant’s sick family member.

Table 10. Themes on Individual/Organizational Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activism/advocacy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community connector</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to outside threats</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing capacity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting property</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness/empathy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less frequent themes dealt with diversity of access to the waterfront, protecting property and historic preservation as assets. Familiar themes about the role of the lake in the neighborhood and connections to nature and wilderness also re-emerged during this round of responses.
6.3.8 Prompt 4: Please share a story about Charlotte’s future. I explained that this question diverged from my usual emphasis on speaking about firsthand experiences, and I invited participants to reflect on what they expected or would have liked the neighborhood to look like 25 to 50 years from now. I selected a longer timeframe to try to avoid focusing on short-term complaints or issues and focus participants on larger ideas and hopes for the neighborhood. Participants shared a variety of visions for the near and distant future:

- **A destination:** Several participants described visions for the neighborhood as a place that would balance the needs of existing residents with attracting more visitors.
  - A woman said that in 25 years, Charlotte could be much like Niagara-on-the-Lake in southern Ontario, Canada. She hoped to see shops, entertainment and an aquarium, along with year-round activities. She suggested working with the neighboring towns of Greece and Irondequoit to organize these activities, such as cross-country skiing or frozen pond races. She emphasized that the waterfront should be “open to the public, not private, and thriving.”
  - A man said he has long been astonished by the lack of development along the Genesee River citywide. He said he hoped to see sensible development that fits in with the existing environment and helps people access Charlotte’s history and places along the river, “a wonderful, wonderful thing to have in your backyard.” He added: “I would hope that in 25 years, there would be some development that would be non-intrusive, yet more, make it more accessible to people. What that is, I’m not sure, because you know, the minute you open the door to real estate developers, all hell breaks loose.”
  - A woman said she hoped to see “a kind and gentle and organic development” in the neighborhood. That might include entertainment, she said, expressing disappointment at the closure of a jazz club on Lake Avenue.
One man joked about Charlotte seceding from the city. He said he hoped it would become “an entertainment mecca” and “a vibrant and thriving and a place that everybody can enjoy – and enjoy nature, enjoy each other.” He credited the recent opening of a city-owned marina for bringing new people to Charlotte.

A woman said she hoped to see boutique shops that bring people into the neighborhood year-round. Buildings like the Roger Robach Community Center at Ontario Beach Park (Figure 14) or the Port Terminal Building (Figure 15) are underused and could be better promoted and used to draw people, she said.

Figure 14. Roger Robach Community Center
A woman said she hoped to see more diversity in the neighborhood. She said she hoped the neighborhood would not lose its village feel, where many people know each other. “We’ve seemed to come together, many of us never having met before, and I think this community draws people who want to live in a place like that, and who want to be connected to their neighbors and who can rely on their neighbors,” she said.

A man said in the next 25 years, he hoped to see continued efforts to link the Charlotte section of the Riverway Trail with other segments, with new historical markers along the way. He said he also hoped to see an amphitheater built on the city-owned land previously targeted for development.

Another woman said she wants to see the community “evolve organically,” echoing an earlier participant’s choice of words. “A lot of the elements are in
place to make us really blossom,” she said. The community needs to collectively market itself and work on rebranding, she said. She also said the neighborhood’s future is tied to keeping the lake and river healthy; she viewed adding an education research center to the riverfront as a way to emphasize the importance of sustainability and make education a bigger component of the neighborhood.

- A man said he hoped that when people visit the lighthouse, “it’d be nice if they came at 8 o’clock in the morning and I could say to them, well, you probably don’t have time to see everything.” That would include places to shop and places to stroll without worrying about getting hit by a car, he said. “You’d just kind of say, well, why don’t we go down there and spend the day and not even worry about what you’re going to do, because there will be something.”

- Another participant envisioned the waterfront area as a completely pedestrian zone, except for trolleys that could carry visitors in and out. She also hoped to see water taxis and boating on the river, including rowing and races. A water park also could be a year-round tourist draw, she said.

- **Community life:** A woman said that in the near term, she would like to see the Charlotte Community Association become a “vibrant, huge, life-breathing place” for volunteering. It can bring residents together to be active and engaged, she said.

- **Concern about affordability:** A woman said that as the climate changes and water levels rise, there could be an influx of population in places like Rochester. “Our little, like, unknown region, it is possible that it becomes overtaken by people who can pay exorbitant amounts of money and then people who own property have their taxes go up to the point where they can’t afford to live there,” she said. She hoped to see protections to allow existing residents to remain in the neighborhood if such an influx occurs.
• **Suburbanization:** One woman said she wondered if Charlotte would be annexed by a neighboring suburb, given its proximity, for example, to the Town of Greece. (The City of Rochester annexed Charlotte, an independent village, in 1916 [Barnes, 1975]).

6.3.9 **Themes from Prompt 4 themes.** The most common theme in this round was the need for year-round activity in the neighborhood, where most activity at the lake and port area shuts down during cold weather (Table 11). Whether or not they used the exact same terminology, multiple participants spoke about the need for an organic type of development that would draw more activity to Charlotte without changing its character in any fundamental way. Protecting public access to the water also emerged as a frequent theme. This was followed by creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment in the neighborhood, as well as additional cultural and entertainment activities.

**Table 11. Themes on Visions for the Future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need more year-round activity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Organic&quot; development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect public access to water</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More pedestrian-friendly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More arts/culture/entertainment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight neighborhood history</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More small businesses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor/estuary education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalize underused buildings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional cooperation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for community brand/identity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of displacement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for greater diversity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability/healthy waterways</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for community control</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Less frequent themes included the needs to enhance civic engagement; to highlight or amplify neighborhood history; to create more small shops and businesses; and to offer outdoor and estuary education on the waterfront. Individual participants touched on the need to revitalize underused buildings, the risk of displacement in a world transformed by climate change, the potential for the neighborhood to become more suburban, the need to protect the health of the river and lake, and the need for greater diversity in Charlotte.

To the extent that it was possible to assess whether participants forming or enhancing social capital during the event, several people exchanged contact information at the end of the workshop or asked me to share their email addresses with others in the group. This suggested at least an interest in maintaining and developing connections made during the event.

6.3.10 Final response round. I again asked residents to share which remarks particularly resonated with them, challenged their thinking or otherwise made a strong impression. Conversation briefly focused on further exploration of the neighborhoods connections to the Underground Railroad before coming to an end. Some participants exchanged contact information before leaving.

6.4 Post-workshop assessment

6.4.1 Post questionnaires. Questionnaires were of limited use in assessing the outcomes of the workshop. Only seven of the 13 participants completed both questionnaires, and not all did so in ways that were consistent. For example, one participant completed the pre-questionnaire in complete sentences, but only entered a word or two in response to most of the questions on the second questionnaire. This made comparisons difficult. As a result, I did not use the post-questionnaires as a data source for analysis. The questionnaires were nonetheless helpful in identifying topics of interest for interview guides for specific participants.
6.4.2 Post interviews. This section discusses overall observations about themes that emerged during post-interviews and then provides individual case studies to illustrate in more detail how participants experienced and understood the outcomes of the storytelling workshop.

I completed in-person interviews of approximately one hour each with 11 of the 13 workshop participants in January and February 2018. Interviews were generally conducted at coffee shops or restaurants in Charlotte or elsewhere in the Rochester area; one interview took place at the participant’s home, per her invitation. The interview guide asked specific questions about assets, social capital and how the storytelling event differed or was similar to the charrette. It also included general questions that invited participants to reflect on their impressions of the workshop once they were several weeks removed from it, and to consider which of the other participants’ stories they remembered most readily, and why.

Participants spoke largely in positive terms about the workshop. Several interviewees described the experience as worthwhile, positive, enlightening, and fabulous, among other descriptors. Multiple interviewees described the format and workshop as “comfortable” or “intimate,” allowing them to discuss feelings and ideas openly, and to establish connections with others at the table as they shared stories.

The setting and format were the main distinctions that the participants drew between the storytelling workshop and charrette. Several interviewees described interactions with fellow participants in the charrette as more businesslike, or simply lacking the time or opportunity to get to know one another’s backgrounds, values and motivations in detail. “If you don’t have some background like that, you don’t understand why this person is thinking this way and this person is thinking that way, and what’s driving those thoughts,” one participant said. “If you don’t have a reasonable understanding of those things, you’re going to have a hard time coming to a successful compromise.”

Another participant described more of a sense of community at the storytelling workshop. “Assuming you’re developing this public space for the people, it might be nice to
actually know who’s in the bodies of the people, and that there are actually people rather than numbers, blocks of color, whatever they define us by," she said. “Here’s the other thing that for me came up, is what was the value of this land. It was, you know, how much it meant to people’s hearts, as opposed to what to do with it.”

Another interviewee said he was aware at the charrette that there was limited time in which to accomplish a lot of discussion and work. While charrette participants shared a variety of ideas that they thought would benefit the neighborhood, they did not have as much chance to discuss what they value in the neighborhood and why, he said. Another participant said the charrette was based more on discussion of facts, while the storytelling workshop provided additional opportunities to build bridges and find common ground with other participants. One woman described the other participants in her group at the charrette as strangers, and the discussions as focusing more on brick-and-mortar aspects of the neighborhood; in her view, the storytelling event allowed more exploration of people’s motivations and perceptions of community needs. After the storytelling workshop, “you’re not strangers anymore,” she said.

Some of the interviewees, however, made clear that the charrette was a higher priority for determining the neighborhood’s development. One participant did not see significant differences in the themes that emerged from the two events. Another participant described the storytelling workshop as a more intimate setting where she got a better sense of the passion that people feel for the neighborhood; however, she felt that the themes that emerged from the discussion largely echoed those from the charrette. Another participant listed themes that she enjoyed hearing during the storytelling event, but did not describe them or the overall experience as substantively different or distinct from the charrette.

One participant described feeling uncomfortable during the workshop discussion of whether certain renters or students in the neighborhood were “the best element.” She reiterated her observation that this type of language often is code for non-white people, whether or not the speaker intended it to come across that way. While she otherwise spoke positively about the
workshop, her experience points to a critical need to be more intentional in the design of this
type of exercise and to facilitate discussions that touch on generalizations or stereotypes,
particularly regarding race, such that all participants feel comfortable and safe. This participant
and others, however, said they thought it was worthwhile to explore the issue of race during the
storytelling exercise in order to understand and in some cases challenge different perspectives
on the subject. At least one interviewee, however, was uncertain how to accomplish this in a
non-confrontational way. The participants who used the language that was a source of
discomfort said in post-interviews that the concerns they voiced about renters only referred to
those who caused trouble in the neighborhood, and noted that as landlords, they have positive
relationships with tenants of various economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. They also
supported the idea of trying to better integrate the rental complex into the neighborhood.

Interviewees identified a variety of new assets or information that they learned from the
storytelling workshop. Common overarching themes included impressions of the other
participants' love and appreciation for the neighborhood, both positive and negative perceptions
of race relations in Charlotte, the connection to nature described by several participants, and the
emotion that some participants felt for living in Charlotte. Some of the people who recently
moved to the neighborhood or returned to it said they were struck by the love and nostalgia that
longtime residents had for Charlotte; longtime residents, in turn, said they were pleased to learn
that the neighborhood also was meaningful to people who had recently moved there. At the
charrette, “I learned more [about] the nuts and bolts of the components that make up the area,
where the storytelling was more about people,” one participant said.

On more specific themes, multiple participants said they were previously unaware of the
issues and complaints about the Snug Harbor housing complex, nor the concerns some of the
participants described about high school students in the neighborhood. One interviewee, who is
White, said the insights shared by another participant made her more aware of race in the
neighborhood and left her hoping to help find ways to better integrate high school students into
the community and “heal broken relationships.” Another participant said she had not thought of
the relatively wild character of the river gorge or value of nature in the neighborhood as assets
before hearing others in the storytelling group reflect on them; similarly, a participant said she
had not considered how individual people might be assets to the community.

Participants differed on the extent to which they made lasting connections with others at
the storytelling workshop. While a few people had been in touch after the event, most had not.
Some indicated that they hoped to remain in contact, whether to organize specific activities or
volunteer work in the neighborhood or simply to remain acquaintances or potential friends.
Others spoke positively about interactions with others at the storytelling workshop, but viewed
the experience as a one-off event without much expectation of staying in touch.

Several participants offered feedback on how the storytelling exercise or elements of it
might be incorporated into a participatory planning process like a charrette or otherwise used as
a community development tool. One woman suggested holding storytelling exercises in the
neighborhood two to four times a year as a way to get more people in the neighborhood talking
to others they might normally never meet. Multiple interviewees suggested holding a storytelling
event before the charrette as a way to identify more ideas to pursue during the planning
process, or to help participants get to know and understand each other before the main event.

6.4.2.1 Case study #1. Before the storytelling workshop, Yvonne, who lives south of the
lakefront, did not know much about the residential portion of the neighborhood near the water.
She was mainly familiar with the beach at Ontario Beach Park. The stories shared during the
exercise helped her to better understand the people who live there and other resources the area
has to offer, including the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse and the historical society that runs it.
“All these wonderful resources and people, it humanized it more for me than, it’s just the beach.”
Having worked to organize a tenant association in her own apartment complex, Yvonne took particular interest in the discussion about the Snug Harbor housing development. The association formed in part to stand up for disenfranchised and elder tenants, and to help tenants make connections to one another, she said. The Snug Harbor conversation made her see a need for similar efforts at the neighborhood level. “It really just comes down to getting to know them, getting to know each other,” she said of Snug Harbor tenants.

For Yvonne, these realizations were the result of an unforced and comfortable opportunity to talk with her neighbors. “Everybody telling their story gave me a personal connection to them … The charrette was all business. … I downplayed more of what I wanted to personally get out of it so I could focus on the big project. But at the storytelling thing, that’s where we got to open up our personalities and say things, and make connections.”

These connections have multiplied for Yvonne. They included connecting with another participant who volunteers at the lighthouse, which Yvonne now plans to visit. She also talked to CCA members about getting more involved with the neighborhood organization, and with another participant about potential grant-writing work. After the workshop, she appeared as a guest on a local radio program where one of the other participants works as a producer and discussed community building. Tenants in her building who heard the appearance left notes at her apartment, helping her to establish new relationships with her immediate neighbors.

At the charrette, Yvonne said she initially resisted being assigned to a group with a predetermined topic of discussion for the day, though she ultimately came to feel more comfortable and confident in her ability to discuss the subject at hand. If an intimate exercise like the storytelling workshop were held before the charrette, she might have felt differently. “It wouldn’t matter who we got put with,” she said. “We would feel so much better that people kind of already knew us and knew what our motivations were.”
6.4.2.2 Case study #2. A participant who played a major role in organizing the charrette described the storytelling workshop as “fabulous,” “intimate” and “non-threatening.” “I learned a lot about the people there,” she said. “Most of them I already knew, but I learned a lot more.” The format, where people sat facing one another, was important for dialogue and for people to feel valued and open to sharing, she said. She was interested to learn about the potential to investigate Charlotte’s connections to the Underground Railroad and to hear about neighbors who reach out to each other more often than she is able due to a busy schedule and frequent travel. For her, the participants’ love of the neighborhood was a clear and common theme.

Unsurprisingly, however, she found her experience as a charrette organizer to be a more meaningful way to build social capital than the brief storytelling workshop. The months-long process of building a team and planning a major event helped her to develop new relationships with people she did not know before and improved her connections to people with whom she had disagreed in the past. Storytelling also may be a way to accomplish similar goals, she said, but she is unlikely to find the time to reconnect with people from the storytelling group. If someone else from the group were to organize a get-together, however, she would be interested in joining. Following the charrette and storytelling workshop, she said the CCA has been working to add opportunities for neighbors to socialize, including its first-ever holiday party. The storytelling workshop may be one of the motivations for the party, she said.

The woman recalled hearing the emphasis that other participants placed on the natural environment during the storytelling workshop, but recalled hearing similar themes during the charrette. Storytelling participants discussed these values in different terms. “I think storytelling echoed it, but on a more intimate level,” she said. “I got a sense of the true passion for it.”

6.4.2.3 Case study #3. A third participant said the storytelling workshop often had a nostalgic feeling, given that some participants were raised in Charlotte and still live there, or otherwise have strong ties to the neighborhood. While she lived there for a time growing up, she later
moved several times and only returned recently. She did not feel as connected to the neighborhood, but said she enjoys living there, including its small neighborhood feel and easy access to its branch library.

After leaving the workshop, remarks about certain people being “not the best element” stayed with this participant, who interpreted the phrase as a reference to non-White people like her. “That did make me uncomfortable as a Black person, but unfortunately, that’s part of our culture,” she said. It was nonetheless good to air these views during an honest conversation, as the person who used this language might not have realized its impact on other people, she said. She offered suggestions for how a facilitator might better address such language – for example, by simply asking the speaker to clarify what he meant.

The participant said other stories from the workshop have stayed with her, including a woman who emotionally described her relationship with her property and the water, and another participant who referred to the lake as her “girlfriend.” Hearing others’ thoughts on Turning Point Park brought back childhood memories of going there, she said. She was previously unaware of the perceived issues at the Snug Harbor housing complex or Charlotte High School.

She had not spoken with any other participants since the workshop, but was open to that possibility. She described feeling uncertain about developing new connections in the neighborhood, as she is unsure whether she may move in the near future.

6.4.3 Charrette review. This section reviews the scope, goals, format and outcomes of the charrette held in Charlotte on Nov. 4, 2017. Analysis and comparison to the storytelling workshop follows in the subsequent section.

The charrette focused on a narrower portion of Charlotte than the storytelling workshop, which set no specific boundaries for the neighborhood. The steering committee chose to focus mainly on the port and waterfront area, or the northernmost portion of the neighborhood, which
is the same general area that the city has previously targeted for development. The overall focus area extended from a cross street about six blocks south of Ontario Beach Park to the lakefront, bounded to the west by a residential portion of the neighborhood and to the east by the Genesee River. Reflecting the waterfront focus, the event was held in the former ferry terminal building, which borders the river and near Lake Ontario.

On charrette day, the neighborhood was divided into six areas of topical or geographic focus, designated by the charrette steering committee in consultation with CDCR staff. Approximately 76 community residents and stakeholders were divided into 12 groups, with two dedicated to discussing each of the six areas. These areas included transportation in the neighborhood; year-round activities and finding ways to maximize underutilized spaces; the port/harbor/marina area; Ontario Beach Park; the northern portion of River Street along the Genesee; and the Lake Avenue corridor. Twenty-four facilitators were assigned to the various subgroups, typically in pairs or in some cases alone, with a small number of longtime facilitators assisting various groups throughout the day. Facilitators were trained before the charrette to try to focus group discussions and keep them on track and schedule without dictating topics or recommendations.

I was assigned as the sole facilitator for one of the two transportation groups, which had six participants. This included four Charlotte residents, a woman who lived in a different city neighborhood, and an architecture student from Alfred University who was interested in being part of a participatory planning process. The people who lived in the neighborhood included decades-long residents and people who had moved within the past 10 years. The day began with opening remarks from elected leaders, charrette organizers and CDCR staff, who offered a brief presentation on urban design principles (such as walkability and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists). A member of the charrette steering committee also led a presentation on the historic development of the neighborhood, first as a maritime village, then as a center of shipping and industry, and later as an amusement and resort destination.
My group began with brief introductions and reviewed a guide provided by CDCR that asked us to consider traffic flow in, out and around the study area, including motor vehicles, buses, bikes, pedestrians and water traffic. Parking, bus stops and street furniture also were part of our purview. The guide listed potential areas of concern, including limited access and connectivity to other city neighborhoods. Our group also had four goals pre-established by the charrette steering committee in consultation with CDCR staff:

- To discuss the potential to create a gateway to the waterfront area that was accessible, safe, walkable and engaging;
- To determine ways to provide traffic flow along with efficient parking and accommodations for alternative forms of transportation;
- To find creative ways to ensure easy access to recreation areas and businesses;
- To provide equitable options for water transportation on the river, including adaptations for seasonal weather.

These goals were supplemented with a list of seven potential strategies to meet these goals, including providing a variety of transportation options, providing additional bicycle infrastructure and finding ways to minimize parking while still providing efficient access to businesses and the waterfront area.

After introductions, my group quickly began discussing potential priorities and areas of interest for transportation in Charlotte. These included concerns about pedestrian safety, inadequate transit options and an abundance of waterfront land occupied by surface parking lots. After roughly an hour, my group and most others left the terminal building to walk portions of the neighborhood and make observations relevant to our topic. We walked much of Lake Avenue in the charrette focus area, observing areas that lacked crosswalks, a lack of gateway features on the street, relatively few bus stops and limited infrastructure for cyclists.

After returning to the port building, we developed a list of objectives that built off the broad goals provided by CDCR, and we began to develop proposed solutions over a working
lunch. Goals included bringing more people to the neighborhood, enhancing pedestrian safety, improving circulation within the neighborhood and creating a unified theme for neighborhood gateways. We spent the next two hours mapping our proposed interventions, such as redeveloping an unused train depot near the river as a multi-modal transportation terminal on a section of railroad now used infrequently for rail car storage. Group members proposed constructing a similar transportation facility on the opposite side of the neighborhood and suggested operating a trolley that would circulate through the neighborhood and along the waterfront and park while traveling between the two stations. They also considered the potential to connect Charlotte by light rail to the center city. Combined with the development of remote parking and shuttle buses that could deliver visitors to the transportation terminals, group members proposed transforming the northern section of Lake Avenue into a pedestrian-only street during the summer, allowing car access only to residents and business deliveries. By providing alternative ways to reach the waterfront, we identified opportunities to reduce surface parking. Other ideas included developing water taxis, reducing car lanes, adding curb bump-outs to protect pedestrians crossing Lake Avenue, expanding an existing bicycle share program, and developing pedestrian-friendly attractions, such as a winter skating rink, an arts center or a freshwater aquarium.

I attempted to closely follow the CDCR training by intervening in or steering discussions to suggest ways to keep the group’s work on schedule, to provide a menu of potential options to address specific concerns without voicing support for a particular intervention, and to assist as a note taker and mapmaker. The day culminated with each group selecting one or two members who briefly presented their ideas to the rest of the charrette participants.

Subsequent to the charrette, CDCR developed an 88-page report that compiled all hand-drawn maps and sketches from each group, along with transcriptions of all notes. Without knowing the dynamics of other groups, the notes from each one and the end-of-day presentations suggested that the other subgroups had similar experiences. All participated in
neighborhood walkthroughs and spent their afternoons engaged in urban design-focused discussions of how to address challenges presented by the built environment in Charlotte. Final presentations generally consisted of a group member describing a vision for each group’s assigned topic, using maps and sketches as visual aids.

6.4.4 Comparison of storytelling workshop and charrette. The charrette and storytelling exercise were designed to achieve very different goals – while the storytelling workshop was designed around exploring assets, varied perspectives and the potential to build social capital, the charrette was meant to identify a range of potential interventions to capitalize on opportunities and address concerns in the neighborhood, with the ultimate goal of helping community residents and stakeholders coalesce behind a shared vision for the neighborhood. Still, there are clear similarities, including discussions of assets and problems.

A review of the charrette notes compiled by other groups reveals areas of overlap with the storytelling workshop, particularly regarding visions for the future. One of the Lake Avenue corridor groups, for example, discussed hopes that the waterfront area could become more like Niagara-on-the-Lake. A storytelling participant made the very same comparison at the workshop roughly one month later. Visions for the future were perhaps the area where the two events overlapped most; the final question during the storytelling workshop yielded responses that sometimes echoed the types of scenarios described at the charrette.

In other similarities, presenters also spoke in general terms about the importance of Lake Ontario and the Genesee River as focal points of the neighborhood and potential sources of inspiration. Like the storytelling workshop, themes of disconnection or distance from other parts of the city also emerged as presenters described ideas to better link Charlotte to other neighborhoods. A majority of speakers voiced a preference for low-rise buildings in order to preserve waterfront views, touching on the same value that many storytelling participants placed on maintaining the neighborhood’s connection to the water; similarly, presenters described
various strategies to improve public access to the lake and river. Year-round activities, which emerged as a major theme during the workshop, also were a major topic of charrette discussion. Both events also touched on the need to revitalize underused buildings.

The way that similar assets were discussed at the two events, however, differed in substantial ways. While charrette participants identified the lake and river as assets, the format of the event offered limited opportunities to explore how or why these resources were important to the neighborhood, nor what specific services or benefits they provide to those who live nearby. The storytelling workshop gave participants a chance to delve into these how and why questions, potentially providing more specific opportunities to identify how best to protect or enhance these services. A similar dynamic could be seen in other discussions of assets. While the historic value of structures such as the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse was named as an asset during the charrette, there was additional insight in a storytelling participant’s description of the lighthouse as a place where he could connect and share his neighborhood with visitors from other parts of the city, region or world. Ontario Beach Park predictably arose as an asset in both events, but the storytelling event provided a richer perspective on what the park meant to the participants as a place of introspection, comfort or spiritual connection. This understanding of the park has clear implications for planning and development in the neighborhood; for example, it highlights the potential conflicts in developing the waterfront in any way that might be perceived as encroaching upon or diminishing the park’s character. This shows that insights revealed through storytelling not only differ from those produced through the charrette, but could potentially complement the charrettes outcomes in important ways.

In other ways, the events produced more dramatically different outcomes. The storytelling workshop identified individual activists, advocates, elected officials, volunteers, civic groups, religious communities and businesses as assets. The charrette dealt in a limited way with these types of resources, but produced a much more exhaustive inventory of assets that are part of the built environment, including historic buildings and potentially developable sites.
The wild character of the river gorge was identified as an asset in the storytelling event alone; specific capacities of people and organizations also were identified as assets, including the kindness or empathy displayed by firefighters who helped one participant’s grandmother and the organizing capacity of the CCA. The disparities in the types of assets identified during the event can largely be attributed to the differences in focus for the events; it could be expected that a charrette focused on urban design would yield many more brick-and-mortar themes than a workshop built around stories about personal experiences and reflections.

Similar disparities emerged in the challenges identified during the two processes. While primarily focused on identifying common ground and solutions, the charrette identified a wide range of specific challenges in land use and the built environment, such as unsafe pedestrian crossings at specific intersections, lack of wayfinding signs to direct visitors to attractions such as the lighthouse, disconnections on the Riverway Trail, and a somewhat abrupt transition from one zoning code to another. Challenges identified during the storytelling workshop generally were more holistic, and not all concerned the physical landscape or built environment. Instead, storytellers identified challenges surrounding racial tension, crime and safety, tension between homeowners and low-income renters, and the lack of integration of public school students into community life. Identifying strategies to address both these categories of challenges is likely integral to successful community development in Charlotte. For example, a plan or project that ignores the Snug Harbor complex, once it is fully occupied again, would potentially overlook hundreds of people with human and social capital to offer, as well as needs that might go unaddressed, lacking a more robust effort to engage them in planning. Further isolation and stigma against the development and its tenants also could lead to continued deterioration and disinvestment of the property, unsafe conditions for residents, and potential blight for the surrounding community. At the same time, the storytelling workshop’s more general expressions of interest in a more pedestrian-friendly environment could not be addressed without the level of detail the charrette provided on specific problematic crosswalks and intersections.
It’s important to note that some of these differences are geographic. The Snug Harbor complex, for example, lies outside the focus area identified for the charrette. Nonetheless, the storytelling discussion about the complex suggested broader implications for how at least some neighborhood residents regard low-income renters, which could and perhaps should be addressed in a larger community plan. It also is difficult to envision a neighborhood plan that succeeds while paying no attention to this complex. This shows potential for the storytelling process to identify larger themes that are relevant even in more specific parts of the neighborhood that are the focus of a narrower planning effort.

The differences in the character of conversations that occurred at the two events, detailed earlier in the post-interviews section of this paper, is another important distinction between the two processes. Participants in both the charrette and storytelling workshop described a level of intimacy and empathy in the latter format that they did not find in the former, which was described as more businesslike and focused on working through a busy schedule, even if participants spoke at times about their love for the community.

6.4.5 Collaborative narrative. I developed a 10-page narrative about the storytelling workshop, including condensed versions of the recommendations that appear here, and shared it by email in April 2018 with all of the workshop participants. I asked participants to review the document and invited them to make edits or suggest any changes that they saw fit, emphasizing that I wanted their feedback on whether my interpretations of their stories were accurate and whether my conclusions were consistent with their views of the community. I gave respondents approximately a week and a half to review the report and sent a reminder two days before my loose deadline. I received responses from six of the participants, most of whom had only general feedback and indicated they felt that it was an accurate summation of the storytelling exercise. One participant provided more detailed edits, most of which were minor clarifications, such as providing a more specific location of the port development proposal that failed in 2016,
and noting that both the charrette and storytelling exercise addressed a prevailing sense that the waterfront will never be a vibrant place in the winter.

As of this writing, I was in the final stages of formatting the report to submit it to CDCR, which has expressed general interest in my findings on the use of storytelling in public engagement, and to members of the former Charrette Day Steering Committee. The committee has since changed its name to the CCA Community Development Committee and continues to work on developing a more specific vision plan for the neighborhood based on the findings of the charrette. The narrative is intended to help inform this ongoing effort.
7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Addressing the research questions

This section returns to this project’s central research questions, exploring how this project has answered them and what implications they may hold for neighborhood planning and community development. The section then proceeds to discuss limitations of this project and recommendations for future research and implementation.

7.1.1 Question #1: Can a facilitated, place-based group storytelling exercise help participants to develop a more nuanced and holistic understanding of their community?

Analysis of the storytelling workshop and post-interviews clearly demonstrates the capacity of this approach to place-based storytelling to help participants develop new knowledge of their communities and neighbors, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of their community. Some of the narratives shared in this exercise had impacts consistent with Eckstein’s (2003) conception of stories as a means of defamiliarizing places that are so close to us that we fail to absorb new perspectives or information that challenges our own. As Eckstein suggested, stories helped some of the storytelling participants to expand their sense of the neighborhood and their place within it. A number of participants said in post-interviews that they had been unaware of the Snug Harbor housing complex or the perceived problems with criminal activity and safety there and in the surrounding neighborhood. Others found their perceptions of race relations in the neighborhood challenged for better or worse, whether that meant hearing that Charlotte may be more welcoming to people of color than they had thought or developing newfound concern that racial stereotypes or generalizations underlie at least some concerns about the behavior of teenagers and renters who live in low-income housing. Several participants described gaining a new appreciation or a deeper understanding of features of the natural landscape in the neighborhood after hearing their neighbors describe meaningful experiences with wilderness and their deep love of Charlotte’s pockets of nature.
It is important, however, not to exaggerate the dynamic described above. While participants shared new insights after the workshop, it would be an overstatement to suggest that anyone left with dramatic transformations to positions or perspectives that took years or even lifetimes to form. It would be unreasonable to expect participants to leave a two-hour exercise with profoundly different perspectives on race, for example, or the fundamental character of their community. Rather, the dynamic first described by Eckstein provided insights that appeared to add detail or nuance to participants’ existing perceptions, called attention to aspects of community life with which some were previously unfamiliar, or began to challenge pre-existing ideas without necessarily changing them completely. In other words, this appears to be a process that plants seeds for change. That still makes this methodology a potentially powerful framework for neighborhood-level conversations about community development that can help even longtime residents begin to see beyond preconceived notions and to gain insights about their communities that might otherwise be difficult to perceive.

Other stories shared during the workshop did not necessarily challenge residents’ existing points of view, but provided greater depth to their understanding of the community. This includes the often very personal descriptions of participants’ relationships to natural features provided other participants with greater insight into a part of the rich emotional life of the neighborhood and its residents (Bulkens et al., 2015) or the neighborhood of feeling rather than one of fact (Rotella, 2003). One participant described this knowledge as a realization – despite growing up in the neighborhood, she had never thought about nature’s presence there in this way. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that before,” she said during a post-interview. Others who felt strong emotional, spiritual or religious ties to the neighborhood’s landscape said they were pleased, and in some cases surprised, to hear both longtime residents and relative newcomers describe these features in such similar terms. Both types of storytellers gained a richer sense of the extent and depth of the emotional roots that underlie the importance that many Charlotte residents ascribe to the lake and river. This understanding could be critical to the success of a
neighborhood plan or proposal for community development. Any proposal perceived as encroaching on either resource, whether that perception is accurate or not, might be viewed by some segment of residents as an existential threat to resources they regard as critical to their emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Any plan or proposal would do well to at least acknowledge and speak to this instead of referring to the lake and river as primarily recreational and aesthetic resources. It also would likely be important to explain how any recommendations or proposals will preserve or enhance these resources for the community. There also are spatial and physical components of the emotional and spiritual experiences that the participants described, including access to the existing pier and sight lines to the water from specific locations on major streets. Planners would do well to incorporate these attributes into their work.

Where stories about the lake and river provided valuable insights into the neighborhood’s most beloved resources, others provided participants an understanding of more difficult subjects. Competing narratives emerged in the responses to Prompt 3 – one of low-income renters and high school students causing disruption to homeowners, and another of renters and students who might be untapped assets to the neighborhood if not for stereotypes that marginalize them. These exchanges highlighted important points of potential conflict and mistrust in the neighborhood. While a number of participants said they believed it was worthwhile to air and discuss these points of conflict, it became clear that the format and design of the questions offered participants little chance to discuss or identify opportunities to address these problems; it also is clear that the exchange could have been better facilitated to address discomfort caused by language that some participants interpreted as racial code. Despite these shortcomings, the exchange made multiple participants aware of the perceived issues at the housing complex and school for the first time, enhancing their understanding of the community. This led some participants to interrogate and challenge the assumptions underlying the perceived problems, and these people at least began a general discussion about better integrating students and renters into the fabric of the neighborhood. From a planning
perspective, this exchange highlighted segments of the community that appear to be disconnected from most neighborhood-level discussions and planning, who may have both positive contributions to offer and needs that are unmet. Failing to better engage these populations not only would overlook hundreds of people who might be assets to the community, but risks further isolating these populations, potentially worsening divisions within the neighborhood.

Finally, while assets are discussed in greater detail below, the participants’ discussions on these themes also demonstrated a deeper or more holistic understanding of the community. In several instances, workshop participants developed a more detailed and expansive understanding of the neighborhood’s assets; the variety of qualities, benefits or services that make these assets valuable; and how their neighbors perceive and relate to these assets. Some participants also developed a broader conception of what assets can be, including other people, community organizations and capacities offered by both leaders and their neighbors.

7.1.2 Question #2: Can this story-driven exercise yield outcomes that differ from and/or add value to an established public engagement method, such as a charrette? As discussed in detail in the section titled “Comparison of Storytelling Workshop and Charrette,” there is clear evidence that the storytelling workshop produced themes substantially different in both content and character from those that emerged from the charrette.

Overall, the charrette produced a far more exhaustive inventory of physical structures and places that could be considered assets to Charlotte; a variety of specific urban design interventions to address concerns about the built environment; and in many cases, more specific visions or proposals for the future of the neighborhood. The storytelling workshop overlapped in some areas, including some of the assets identified and similarities in some of the visions that participants shared for the future. The workshop, however, discussed assets in very different ways by delving into how and why assets benefit the neighborhood. The workshop also
identified critical themes explored little in the charrette, including the importance that residents place on the wildness of the river gorge and the tensions surrounding the Snug Harbor housing complex. The workshop examined a variety of assets largely unexplored at the charrette, including neighborhood advocates, civic groups and religious communities. Finally, while both events provided opportunities for Charlotte residents to build social capital by meeting and interact with neighbors, several participants described the storytelling format as more intimate and comfortable, allowing opportunities to connect with people on a more emotional level.

The outcomes of the storytelling workshop clearly have potential to add value to or complement those from a charrette process. Details on how and why people value certain assets could better inform how these assets might best be leveraged for community development, while also flagging potential pitfalls for planners to avoid. The wider variety of assets identified in the workshop may be helpful in painting a more holistic picture of resources available in the neighborhood and could provide a richer set of options to draw on in developing a plan. Some problems identified through the storytelling workshop were distinct from those described in the charrette report, and no less critical to address; it is difficult to conceive of a neighborhood plan that can succeed without at least attempting to acknowledge and address fears and concerns about low-income renters and students. Finally, the more intimate setting of the storytelling workshop allowed multiple participants to connect and engage one another in ways they found elusive at the charrette. Some participants explicitly suggested appending or incorporating the storytelling format into a charrette. That said, the final prompt, which asked storytellers to share a vision for the future, was at times redundant to the visions people shared during the charrette and should be revised in any future implementation.
7.1.3 Question #3: Can this exercise help participants to identify a greater number or variety of assets in their community? Through the responses to the pre-questionnaires and post-interviews, the workshop clearly demonstrated potential for this approach to place-based storytelling to identify a greater number or variety of assets in a community. In several instances, workshop participants developed a more detailed and expansive view of neighborhood assets; the range of qualities, benefits or services that make these assets valuable; and how their neighbors perceive and relate to these assets. Some participants also developed a broader conception of what can be an asset that can be leveraged on the community’s behalf. In post-interviews, some participants explicitly expressed that this approach was a helpful way to explore neighborhood assets.

Participants in post-interviews listed a number of assets they had either not considered before or of which they had been unaware. These included physical places, buildings and public facilities in the neighborhood. Some participants also came to understand qualities of assets that they had not previously; for example, on participant said she had not fully considered the wildness of the river gorge as a quality that made it an asset to the neighborhood. Others had not considered the extent to which people, organizations, human capacities and social connections could be assets, having previously focused on a more brick-and-mortar conceptualization of assets.

The framing of the prompts during the workshop accomplished asset identification in different ways. The first question, which asked participants to share stories about a place of importance to them, was fairly straightforward. Its phrasing focused the participants on how and why the places they identified as assets were of importance to them on a personal level, rather than reflecting on how these places might be of interest to the broader neighborhood. The latter framing might produce useful information, too, by asking respondents to look outside themselves and consider how others might relate to or find use in the assets they identified. During the charrette, speakers and members of my subgroup often appeared to discuss assets
in these terms, considering how other residents or visitors to the neighborhood might interact with them. By asking participants to instead reflect inward, however, the storytelling prompt produced a different type of insight, exploring the deep emotional, spiritual and religious connections that participants felt with the places they identified. Often, participants had thought of these places as assets before, but in listening to others describe their relationships to them, they came to understand them from new perspectives.

The second prompt dealing with urban myths was useful in identifying new assets for at least some participants, some of whom left regarding high school students and renters as potential strengths yet to be tapped, for example. By asking participants to identify and correct a myth about the neighborhood, several went a step further by turning misinformation on its head and identifying its subject as an asset. This dynamic was not uniform; a number of respondents mainly used the opportunity to cite common misunderstandings of Charlotte and refute them without identifying an asset in the process. The prompt also yielded an exchange that was informative, if unanticipated, about some participants’ views of negative influences in the neighborhood without responding to the initial framing about myths, leading to the discussion of students and renters. This prompt could be refined in two ways. First, it could ask participants to focus more specifically on potential strengths of the neighborhood that are either overlooked or misunderstood as challenges. Second, a separate prompt could be developed to produce the type of exchange about renters, students and stereotypes by asking participants to share stories about the biggest challenges they face in their part of the neighborhood.

The third prompt was more straightforward in asking participants to consider organizations or events that made an impact on the neighborhood. The responses largely explored various ways in which people, civic groups and local businesses are assets to the community. The fourth prompt, however, was often redundant to the charrette. While it led participants to reflect on how assets might be created, degraded or enhanced in the future, it largely did so in ways the charrette already had.
7.1.4 Question #4: Can this exercise build social capital among participants? The workshop and post-interviews provided evidence that the storytelling exercise helped to produce conditions that can lead to social capital. Multiple participants described the storytelling setting as comfortable and intimate, and a way for them to better understand their neighbors’ motivations and values. During the exercise, one participant offered to connect another with a historian who could help her with a research project, an instance of one person offering to leverage a social connection on behalf of another. A few participants exchanged contact information immediately after the workshop. After the exercise, five participants also asked to have their email addresses shared with others so that they might be able to keep in touch. One participant had somewhat significant contacts with others after the workshop, including an appearance on a radio show where another one of the storytellers is employed. Her experience, however, was not typical; most of those interviewed in subsequent weeks had little or no contact with the other participants.

There is little evidence that the workshop resulted in long-lasting relationships, but this would be an unreasonable expectation for a one-time, two-hour workshop. Indeed, one participant’s reflection on the social capital she built through the charrette planning process suggests there is no shortcut around the long-term engagement and trust-building that such a project entails. This is one of the explicit goals of CDCR’s approach to the charrette planning process. Nonetheless, the descriptions of intimacy, exchanges of contact information and scattered examples of follow-up contact after the storytelling exercise suggest that the experience, even if brief, created an environment ripe for people to build trust and connections – particularly if the participants had further opportunities to interact or engage in an ongoing project. This suggests that storytelling can create conditions that allow participants in a longer planning or community development process to engage in a way that may be more open, comfortable or trusting, and ultimately conducive to building social capital.
7.2 Limitations

The discomfort that one participant described about racial code language showed that as a facilitator, I needed to be more intentional and thoughtful in anticipating how I would deal with situations that might cause any participant to feel uncomfortable or hesitant to share freely. I also needed to better anticipate how to manage remarks that could reasonably be construed as making unfair generalizations or stereotypes about different groups, races or classes of people. It might have been constructive to simply ask a speaker to clarify to whom he or she is referring if making generalizations, or to note that generalizations may make others feel uncomfortable and then ask the speakers to be more specific in their remarks. In the case of the discussion about low-income renters, another option might be to ask the speaker how he might handle the type of rigorous tenant screening he described. Whatever the correct approach, a facilitator needs to develop strategies in advance and be more mindful of the need to ensure all participating individuals feel safe and welcome while participating in the exercise. Because I did not adequately prepare for this, some participants might have felt less safe or willing to share stories openly, which could have diminished their perspectives in both my results and the narrative provided to the participants.

Responses to the pre-questionnaires suggest limitations in the sampling procedure for this project. The overall impression is that at least some members of the intervention group were particularly “plugged in” to neighborhood and civic life, which might have resulted in a fairly narrow set of perspectives on the neighborhood and limited the results of this project. A number of members of the self-selected intervention group had also been involved in planning the charrette, which could reasonably be expected to give them a unique perspective. This is partly a result of recruiting participants from the charrette – a step that was necessary for answering one of the research questions in this project, but not so for other types of storytelling processes in the future. More diverse perspectives might have yielded richer results, while also engaging
individuals who might otherwise be left out of or outright discouraged from participating in discussions about the neighborhood’s future.

While the workshop was designed in part to promote empathetic conversation that would foster social capital, it did not sufficiently anticipate the points of conflict or disagreement that emerged during this process, nor how best to address them. Given the potential conflicts that arose, it would have been constructive to design additional story prompts to help participants to identify opportunities to effect change. While some participants did identify a need to better integrate low-income renters and high school students into the community, a more specific prompt might have identified opportunities for intervention by asking participants to share stories about how they might engage people who are often overlooked or left out of discussions about the neighborhood’s future. Literature on restorative or healing circles may be helpful in better incorporating this approach into the storytelling framework.

The relationship between storytelling and social capital also may require additional study. As discussed above, there is evidence that this type of event might be beneficial for fostering social capital, but it offers no opportunity for further study over time. This might be addressed by designing a storytelling process that takes place across multiple dates or requires participants to work together on a larger project beyond the relatively short duration of this limited exercise.
8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Overview

This project set out to explore the potential for place-based storytelling to enhance public engagement, participatory planning and community development processes. In designing this study, I drew on narrative inquiry to frame my understanding of people’s firsthand stories about their experiences and the information that their narratives convey. I also relied on an emerging body of literature that recognizes these types of stories as a potentially unique medium for eliciting and documenting experiential, intuitive, emotional and somatic knowledge about the places we inhabit, and to express the complexities of community life. This literature identified potential benefits from storytelling in the context of planning and community development, but provided limited research on methodology. To address these gaps, I developed a place-based storytelling methodology to examine four central research questions: whether a storytelling process would help participants to gain a more nuanced or holistic understanding of their community; yield results that differ from or add value to an established engagement process; assist participants in identifying a greater number or variety of community assets; or build or enhance social capital. The project focused on a group storytelling exercise conducted with residents of the Charlotte neighborhood of Rochester, N.Y.; for the purposes of comparison, the study was developed in conjunction with a design charrette in the same neighborhood.

To varying degrees, the answer to all four research questions was Yes. Participants developed newfound knowledge of the personal, emotional and spiritual underpinnings of the values that their neighbors assigned to neighborhood assets like Ontario Beach Park; perceived challenges and threats to the community; and the potential need to better incorporate renters, students and other groups into the civic life of the neighborhood. These learnings or realizations in some cases shifted or expanded the participants’ perception of the neighborhood’s character and composition, contributing to a more nuanced or holistic understanding of the community. A number of participants also developed a more expansive sense of what an asset is or could be
in ways that differed from the charrette. The format also showed promise as a means of building social capital. These findings were limited by the self-selection of participants who already were engaged in civic life in the neighborhood and my inadequate preparation to manage or respond to generalizations and stereotypes that made at least one group member uncomfortable.

8.2 Implications for theory

These outcomes have implications for both theory and practice. Regarding the former, this study provides concrete evidence that storytelling can help participants to develop a more nuanced and holistic understanding of their community, as well as to identify assets consistent with asset-based community development. In the current literature, these benefits are largely theoretical or have been explored to a limited extent. This project also highlights the potential for storytelling to foster social capital, a subject explored little in the literature, and points to possible opportunities for further research in this realm, including explorations of storytelling processes carried out over longer periods of time or built into a longer community development process.

8.3 Implications for practice

In terms of practice, the project has implications for both the Charlotte planning process specifically, and for neighborhood planning and community development in general. For Charlotte, this project identifies profoundly personal and emotional connections that participants associate with the lake, river, various aspects of Ontario Beach Park, and the wildness of the river gorge. Within the constraints of this project, there is no way to be certain whether these results are representative of the larger neighborhood, but it is reasonable to assume that they are not unique to this group. To be successful, a development plan or strategy may need to address these emotional attachments directly and explain how recommendations or proposals will avoid diminishing these resources, or even protect or enhance them. This is not to say that development is impossible at the waterfront because people will inevitably oppose any
perceived threat or change. In fact, the participants in this project expressed openness to some types of change, including programming that draws more activity to the neighborhood and which might allow the public to better interact with or learn about the river and lake. Rather, a plan or proposal that speaks directly to the reasons that people value this place will demonstrate some understanding of why it matters to residents, which may be a step toward establishing credibility and trust with the community. Designing or promoting uses that complement these connections to the water may be more readily seen as beneficial to the community. These might include design elements that buffer development from the park and the river with new types of shared or civic space, a larger portfolio of park programs that build on the contemplative element of the waterfront (such as outdoor meditation classes in warmer months), and enhancing public kayak and canoe access (an idea that also surfaced during the charrette).

Discussions about renters and high school students also highlighted the fact that there are groups regarded with distrust by at least some Charlotte residents. A plan or strategy may do well to avoid further isolating these groups and better integrate them into community life to both reduce stigma against people who are stereotyped and to recognize them as untapped assets to the neighborhood. This might include sustained outreach or joint activities led by the CCA, which has already begun to work on building a relationship with the high school, or developing programs that are mutually beneficial. For example, one option might be engaging student volunteers in a program to assist elder homeowners with basic property maintenance and home repairs, while training students with marketable skills and experience in the construction or property management trades.

Beyond Charlotte, this project demonstrates potential for storytelling to frame or drive a participatory planning or community development process such as a charrette. The study shows that stories can capture a more holistic view of a neighborhood or community that incorporates experiential and emotional knowledge, implicit and explicit beliefs, and a more inclusive understanding of both assets and challenges; the process of sharing stores also can create
conditions that establish trust and empathy. This is a potentially powerful foundation for community development processes on topics both broad and narrow. Participants who have completed a storytelling process may be able to tap knowledge often overlooked in more traditional approaches to land use and development, and be better prepared to cooperate and exchange ideas with other participants who have heard their stories and shared their own in return. These participants also may be better equipped to identify different types of problems that need to be addressed, as well as a richer variety of potential interventions and solutions.

8.4 Potential applications

This raises a question of how or in what format storytelling might be incorporated into a planning or community development process. Several participants suggested afterward that the process might have been more useful before the charrette, rather than an add-on after the fact. Other evidence produced in this study supports the idea that storytelling would function better as an integral element of planning or development by framing the process at its beginning or as a core element incorporated throughout. As the size of the storytelling group seems important to creating the more intimate atmosphere that several participants said they valued, multiple storytelling groups would be needed to engage participants in a charrette the size of the one that took place in Charlotte. Given that the charrette already takes much of a day, it would be necessary to conduct storytelling sessions in advance, shortly before the main event.

Integrating storytelling techniques into a charrette process of the type that CDCR leads could be feasible, given that the charrette subgroups are an ideal size for storytelling. For example, the first hour during which charrette participants make introductions and have preliminary conversations about focus areas might be framed with a storytelling-focused prompt, asking participants to introduce themselves and share a story about a place of particular importance to them. This could be an efficient way to help group members begin to feel comfortable engaging with each other and gain initial insights about their values and
motivations. Similar prompts might be incorporated into other discussions during a charrette. While this approach would not provide the rich level of detail that emerged during the full storytelling workshop, it could provide some enhancement to the charrette experience.

Storytelling approach also may have benefits as a process separate from a charrette. One of the participants in this project suggested regular storytelling exercises at the neighborhood level as a tool to help neighbors get to know and understand one another and to break down barriers. This could be a semi-regular activity employed by community groups or the neighborhood association, perhaps as a form of community-building and/or engaging groups that are often left out of neighborhood discussions about planning and development. Another option is to follow a charrette with storytelling workshops as a way to keep stakeholders engaged in working toward some consensus on goals and principles for community development and planning.

This also raises a question about whom this type of storytelling process should ideally engage – people already engaged in civic life, residents who are less involved, still others who have felt unwelcome or been disconnected from opportunities to participate in decisions about the community? There are potential benefits to some combination of all three, and thus wider sampling than I used in this study may be beneficial. There may be value in neighborhood leaders playing a part in such a process in order to better understand different perspectives about the neighborhood to inform their work within it and to begin to develop social capital with a wider range of neighbors. More diverse viewpoints also could enrich the experience for all, as well as any potential plan or strategy that might result from such a process – for example, the discussion of Snug Harbor and whether to better engage its residents would have been considerably different if one of the participants had lived there. Whatever their background, this exercise made clear that participants in a storytelling process must be willing to engage in a process that at times involves vulnerable exchanges. A participant who is uninterested or unwilling to share stories openly will make limited contributions and will likely gain little from the
process. This means that expanding the range of participants would require effort to engage and build initial trust with people not already inclined or outright discouraged from engaging in neighborhood affairs.

In closing, I return to van Hulst's (2012) call for additional theoretical and practical research on storytelling. This study provides strong evidence that supports the potential benefits identified in the literature. There remains much to learn about which types of stories reveal what information, what methodologies might best realize the benefits of storytelling, and how storytelling might be applied in other approaches to community development and neighborhood planning. Further research can show how to make this promising approach a more integral part of the ways that planners and stakeholders talk about the future of their communities.
October 9, 2017

Dear **DAVID RILEY**:

On 10/9/2017, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>Neighborhood narratives: Storytelling as a foundation for planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>DAVID RILEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00001893</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
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<td>IND, IDE, or HDE:</td>
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Documents Reviewed:

- Riley group interview guide, Category: Other;
- Handout for group interview, Category: Other;
- Riley thesis consent form, Category: Consent Form;
- Riley post-storytelling questionnaire, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires;
- Riley thesis protocol, Category: IRB Protocol;
- Riley participant invitation, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Riley post-charrette questionnaire, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires;

The IRB approved the study from 10/9/2017 to 10/8/2018 inclusive. Before 10/8/2018 or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/8/2018, approval of this study expires on that date. The Initial Study materials for the project referenced above were reviewed and approved by the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) by Initial Study Review. Before to 10/8/2018 inclusive. Before 10/8/2018 or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/8/2018, approval of this study expires on that date. or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review application with required explanations.
You can submit a continuing review application by navigating to the active study in Click IRB and clicking Create Modification / Continuing Review. Studies cannot be conducted beyond the expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

UB IRB approval is given with the understanding that the most recently approved procedures will be followed and the most recently approved consenting documents will be used. If modifications are needed, those changes may not be initiated until such modifications have been submitted to the UBIRB for review and have been granted approval.

Prior to the expiration of this approval, you will receive notification that it is time for the UBIRB to conduct its periodic review of your study. Studies cannot be conducted beyond expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

As principal investigator for this study involving human participants, you have responsibilities to the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) as follows:

1. Ensuring that no subjects are enrolled prior to the IRB approval date.

2. Ensuring that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

3. Ensuring that the UBIRB is notified of:
   - All Reportable Information in accordance with the Reportable New Information Form Smart Form.
   - Project closure/completion by the Continuing Review/Modification/ Study Closure smart form.

4. Ensuring that the protocol is followed as approved by UBIRB unless a protocol amendment is prospectively approved.

5. Ensuring that changes in research procedures, recruitment or consent processes are not initiated without prior UBIRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.

6. Ensuring that the study is conducted in compliance with all UBIRB decisions, conditions, and requirements.

7. Bearing responsibility for all actions of the staff and sub-investigators with regard to the protocol.
8. Bearing responsibility for securing any other required approvals before research begins.

If you have any questions, please contact the UBIRB at 716-888-4888 or ub-irb@buffalo.edu.
October 20, 2017

Dear DAVID RILEY:

On 10/20/2017, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

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<td>Neighborhood narratives: Storytelling as a foundation for planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>DAVID RILEY</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>MOD00003210</td>
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<td>Funding:</td>
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<td>Grant ID:</td>
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<tr>
<td>IND, IDE, or HDE:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Documents Reviewed: | • Riley thesis protocol, Category: IRB Protocol;  
| | • Riley pre-charrette questionnaire, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires; |

The IRB approved the study from 10/20/2017 to 10/8/2018 inclusive. Before 10/8/2018 or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/8/2018, approval of this study expires on that date. The Modification materials for the project referenced above were reviewed and approved by the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) by Modification Review. Before to 10/8/2018 inclusive. Before 10/8/2018 or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/8/2018, approval of this study expires on that date. or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review application with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review application by navigating to the active study in Click IRB and clicking Create Modification / Continuing Review. Studies cannot be conducted beyond the expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.
HIPAA Authorization combined with consent document [delete section if not applicable]

The consent form document includes the HIPAA authorization for use/disclosure of personal health information and has met the required elements of the federal regulations of HIPAA.

HIPAA Partial Waiver granted for Recruitment [delete section if not applicable]

The UBIRB has approved the HIPAA Partial Waiver to permit you to receive personal health information as specified in section (1). The Partial Waiver Form has met the required elements of the federal regulations of HIPAA.

Full HIPAA Waiver [delete section if not applicable]

Based on the information you have provided in the “University at Buffalo Human Research Protections Program Request for Full Waiver of Individual Authorization for Use of Individually Identifiable Health Information” form (waiver request), the UBIRB has determined a full waiver of the individual authorization required by 45 CFR §164.508 for use or disclosure of protected health information is warranted based on the following criteria as specified in 45 CFR 164.512(i) (2). Accordingly:

A) The use or disclosure of protected health information involves no more than a minimal risk to the privacy of individuals, based on, at least, the presence of the following elements:

1) An adequate plan to protect the identifiers from improper use and disclosure;

2) An adequate plan to destroy the identifiers at the earliest opportunity consistent with conduct of the research, unless there is a health or research justification for retaining the identifiers or such retention is otherwise required by law; and

3) Adequate written assurances that the protected health information will not be reused or disclosed to any other person or entity, except as required by law, for authorized oversight of the research study, or for other research for which the use or disclosure of protected health information would be permitted by this subpart;

B) The research could not practicably be conducted without the waiver or alteration; and

C) The research could not practicably be conducted without access to and use of the protected health information.
A brief description of the Protected Health Information for which this alteration or waiver has been granted is provided on the “Request for Waiver of the Authorization for Use of Individually Identifiable Health Information” or “Request for Limited Waiver of the Authorization for Use of Individually Identifiable Health Information for Study Recruitment” which is part of this approval. If HIV information is requested, this waiver is only valid for disclosures consistent with New York Code Public Health Article 27-F.

This full waiver has been reviewed and approved for the above referenced study by the UBIRB to permit you to receive personal health information as specified in section (1) of the waiver request.

UBIRB approval is given with the understanding that the most recently approved procedures will be followed and the most recently approved consenting documents will be used. If modifications are needed, those changes may not be initiated until such modifications have been submitted to the UBIRB for review and have been granted approval.

Prior to the expiration of this approval, you will receive notification that it is time for the UBIRB to conduct its periodic review of your study. Studies cannot be conducted beyond expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

As principal investigator for this study involving human participants, you have responsibilities to the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) as follows:

1. Ensuring that no subjects are enrolled prior to the IRB approval date.

2. Ensuring that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.

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4. Ensuring that the protocol is followed as approved by UBIRB unless a protocol amendment is prospectively approved.

5. Ensuring that changes in research procedures, recruitment or consent processes are not initiated without prior UBIRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.

6. Ensuring that the study is conducted in compliance with all UBIRB decisions, conditions, and requirements.
7. Bearing responsibility for all actions of the staff and sub-investigators with regard to the protocol.

8. Bearing responsibility for securing any other required approvals before research begins.

If you have any questions, please contact the UBIRB at 716-888-4888 or ub-irb@buffalo.edu.
SHARE YOUR STORIES, CHARLOTTE

Saturday, Dec. 2 • 10:30 AM to Noon
Charlotte Branch Library
3557 Lake Ave.

Learn more about your neighbors and community at a storytelling workshop on life in Charlotte.

This workshop is part of a research project led by David Riley, a graduate student at the University at Buffalo. David is studying the role that storytelling can play in neighborhood planning. The workshop will be an enjoyable exploration of your stories about places, people and organizations that shape life in Charlotte.

Pre-registration is required and open to Charlotte charrette participants only.

Sign up or send questions to charlottestorytelling@gmail.com or call (585) 237-8493.
Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

University at Buffalo Institutional Review Board (UBIRB)
Office of Research Compliance | Clinical and Translational Research Center Room 5018
875 Ellicott St. | Buffalo, NY 14203
UB Federalwide Assurance ID#: FWA00008824

Adult Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of research study:
Neighborhood narratives: Storytelling as a foundation for planning

Version Date: Version 1 (9/18/17)

Investigator: David A. Riley

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?
You are being invited to take part in a research study because you have pre-registered to participate in the Charlotte Community Charrette on Nov. 4, 2017. We are conducting this research in partnership with the charrette facilitator, the Community Design Center Rochester, and are seeking charrette participants who are willing to be part of our project.

What should I know about a research study?
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at (585) 237-8493. You may also contact the research participant advocate at 716-888-4845 or researchadvocate@buffalo.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at (716) 888-4888 or email ub-irb@buffalo.edu if:
- You have questions about your rights as a participant in this research
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?
This is a master’s thesis project that will explore using people’s stories about their neighborhoods to shape decisions about planning and development there.
Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

The residents of neighborhood often have rich stories about their community. These stories can tell us a lot about what makes a neighborhood tick – the experience of living there, how residents relate to each other, their goals for the future, and so on. This project will study whether storytelling and oral histories can play a more central part of the neighborhood planning and development process.

In addition to contributing to the academic literature on this topic, this project is expected to produce a report on Charlotte residents’ stories about living in the neighborhood. With participants’ permission, partial transcripts of group and individual interviews, as well as video interviews with participants who volunteer to be filmed, will be provided to both the Community Design Center Rochester and the Charlotte Community Charrette Steering Committee to inform future planning efforts.

How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for between 3 to 5 hours spread in increments over several days, depending on your level of involvement. This would include a 90-minute group exercise to be scheduled after the Charlotte Community Charrette, completing two questionnaires, and a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interviews can be arranged according to your schedule.

How many people will be studied?
We expect about 16-20 people in this research study, including a focus group of 8-10 people and a control group.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
If you are a part of the control group, you will only have to complete a questionnaire after the Charlotte Community Charrette on Nov. 4. This will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you are a part of the storytelling exercise group, a timeline of the project appears below.

- Post-charrette questionnaire (approx. 30 minutes): on or soon after Nov. 4;
- Storytelling exercise (approx. 90 minutes on a date to be scheduled after the Charlotte Community Charrette);
- Post-exercise questionnaire (approx. 30 minutes): after the storytelling exercise
- Follow-up in-person interview (approx. 30 minutes): after the storytelling exercise, in a location to be determined by you and the researcher.

During the storytelling exercise, participants will be asked to share stories about life in Charlotte. This will range from stories about people, places and events that have made an impression on you to stories about more direct experiences. The researcher will serve as a facilitator, and participants will be encouraged to reflect on and discuss each other’s stories. Everyone will have a chance to speak without interruptions, but participants may decline to respond to any question if they choose.

Following the group exercise, participants will be asked to complete a second questionnaire and schedule a follow-up interview in person with the researcher, at a time and location of both parties’ convenience. This interview will explore outcomes of the group exercise and the researcher will ask for your input on a written narrative of key themes that emerged from the group’s stories. Also, if participants are willing, they will be video recorded sharing a story or stories. The video component, however, is voluntary.

Following the one-on-one interviews, the researcher will contact participants by email to share a final draft of the narrative about key themes identified during the storytelling process. Participants will have another opportunity to provide feedback and edit the narrative before the researcher incorporates it into
Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

a report provided to the project partners. Participants who record video interviews will have an opportunity to review the video before deciding whether to approve its use in the final report.

An important note about confidentiality:

It is up to you whether you wish for your name to appear in any of the materials released to the project partners. Some people may wish, for example, to receive credit for their stories. Others may wish to remain unnamed. It is important, however, to recognize that stories are by nature often personal, and it may still be possible for someone who reads a partial transcript of an interview in the final report to identify you even if your name is not attached. Participants will have an opportunity to review any materials that they contributed before they are released, regardless of whether you have elected to use your name in conjunction with this project.

The researcher will not release any participant’s contact information as part of the study report provided to the project partners, nor in the final thesis paper. All interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only; no audio files will be publicly released. All data and files will be retained in an archive at the University at Buffalo Institutional Repository for three years, after which they will be deleted, with the exception of full interview transcripts, which will be retained for six years.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to participate in the questionnaires, the group storytelling session and the follow-up interview. During the group storytelling exercise, it is your responsibility to listen actively to fellow participants without interruption, and to keep the content of the group discussion confidential in order to create a space of mutual respect and trust.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to enroll in this study.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and your decision will not be held against you. If you choose to leave the project, the researcher will delete any information you have provided upon your request, and this data will not be used in the study report or final thesis paper. Anyone who leaves will be asked to participate in an exit interview so the researcher can better understand his or her reasons for leaving.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no known risks associated with this project.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include contributing to planning and community development in the Charlotte neighborhood. The storytelling experience also may help participants to build storytelling skills and make connections with neighbors that carry on beyond the scope of this project.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Participants’ full names, contact information and any other identifiable information will be kept in an encrypted and passcode-protected file during the research process. Other data files will use unique numeric IDs instead of names for participants and will not include contact information or other identifiable information. The only information that will be shared publicly is the report provided to the
Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

project partners, which will identify participants by name only if they choose, and video recordings of participants who volunteer to be filmed.

We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the University at Buffalo’s Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this organization.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?
The principal investigator of the study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Potential reasons for removal include being disruptive or antagonistic presence during the group exercise in a way that makes other participants feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

What else do I need to know?
You will not be paid for participating in this research project. We will provide updates to participants about any changes in the project that might affect your decision to remain as a participant.

Participants will receive a digital copy of the final report provided to the project partners.
Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Use of your name during this project

It is up to you whether you wish for your name to appear in the final research reports released to the project partners. Some people may wish to receive credit for their stories, while others prefer to remain unnamed. Please indicate your preference below. Regardless of your response, participants will have an opportunity to review any materials about stories they contributed to this project before they are released to the project partners.

___ Include my name in connection my contributions to this project in the final reports.
___ Do not include my name in the final reports.

Video consent

Participants in this project may volunteer to be interviewed on camera for a video compilation of stories about the neighborhood. Please indicate below whether you are willing to be filmed. If so, your name would be used to identify you in the final film, which will be released to the project partners.

___ Yes, I would be interested in sharing a story on video.
___ No, I do not wish to be videotaped as part of this project.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research. By signing this form you are not waiving any of your legal rights, including the right to seek compensation for injury related to negligence or misconduct of those involved in the research.

_________________________  __________________________
Signature of subject                  Date

_________________________
Printed name of subject

_________________________  __________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent                  Date

_________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
Charlotte post-charrette questionnaire (administered to control group)

Section 1 of 3

This questionnaire is part of an urban planning research project at the University at Buffalo. Your answers will help the researcher to understand how charrette participants think and feel about certain aspects of their neighborhood.

Your name, address and contact information will be kept confidential.

There are 11 open-response questions. You can complete the questionnaire in 15-20 minutes.

First, please enter your full name.

Please enter your street address.

Please enter an email address.

Did you participate in the Charlotte charrette?

Yes.

No.

Section 2 of 3

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please enter what comes to mind.

Please list any assets you can think of in Charlotte. An asset is a strength of the neighborhood. Assets can include physical places and buildings; organizations; the skills or knowledge of individual people; and social connections.

Please list assets that you think individual people or neighbors offer your neighborhood, if not mentioned above.

What kinds of skills or abilities do you offer as assets to your community?

How would you describe your relationships or connections with your neighbors? This can include people who live nearby on your street or people in the larger Charlotte community.

In what ways could you depend on any of your neighbors for help in an emergency?

What community organizations or clubs are you involved with in Charlotte? Please list the organization and a primary reason you are a member.

What challenges or conflicts does your neighborhood face?

In what ways can the challenges you described be resolved?

In what ways do you and your neighbors think similarly about life in Charlotte?

In what ways do you and your neighbors think differently about life in Charlotte?

Why do you think people choose to live in Charlotte?
Section 3 of 3 (only provided if respondents answered “no” to the question about whether they participated in the charrette).

Sorry!

This questionnaire is only for people who participated in the Charlotte charrette. But thank you for your interest!
Pre-workshop questionnaire (administered to storytelling group)

Section 1 of 2

This questionnaire is part of an urban planning research project at the University at Buffalo. Your answers will help the researcher to understand how participants in the Dec. 2 storytelling workshop think and feel about certain aspects of their neighborhood.

Your name, address and contact information will be kept confidential.

There are 11 open-response questions. You can complete the questionnaire in 15-20 minutes. First, please enter your full name.

Please enter your street address.

Please enter an email address.

Did you participate in the Charlotte charrette?

Yes.

No.

Section 2 of 2

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please enter what comes to mind.

Please list any assets you can think of in Charlotte. An asset is a strength of the neighborhood. Assets can include physical places and buildings; organizations; the skills or knowledge of individual people; and social connections.

Please list assets that you think individual people or neighbors offer your neighborhood, if not mentioned above.

What kinds of skills or abilities do you offer as assets to your community?

How would you describe your relationships or connections with your neighbors? This can include people who live nearby on your street or people in the larger Charlotte community.

In what ways could you depend on any of your neighbors for help in an emergency?

What community organizations or clubs are you involved with in Charlotte? Please list the organization and a primary reason you are a member.

What challenges or conflicts does your neighborhood face?

In what ways can the challenges you described be resolved?

In what ways do you and your neighbors think similarly about life in Charlotte?

In what ways do you and your neighbors think differently about life in Charlotte?

Why do you think people choose to live in Charlotte?
Post-workshop questionnaire (administered to storytelling group)

Section 1 of 3

This questionnaire follows the Dec. 2 storytelling workshop. Thank you for participating!

Many questions are identical to those you completed on the pre-workshop questionnaire. When filling out this version, please think about how your responses may differ - or not - based on what you heard and experienced during the workshop.

There are 15 open-response questions. You can complete the questionnaire in about 20 minutes. Your name will not be attached to your responses in the report on this project. Please enter your street address.

Section 2 of 3

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please enter what comes to mind.

A few days after the event, what about the experience of the storytelling workshop has stuck with you?

Did you hear anything during the workshop that surprised you?

Did you hear anything that resonated with you, troubled you, or challenged your thinking?

Did you have any problems listening or focusing on the other participants during the workshop? If so, what do you think the problem was?

Section 3 of 3

Please remember to focus on whether and how your responses may have changed since filling out the pre-questionnaire.

Please list any assets you can think of in Charlotte. An asset is a strength of the neighborhood. Assets can include physical places and buildings; organizations; the skills or knowledge of individual people; and social connections.

Please list assets that you think individual people or neighbors offer your neighborhood, if not mentioned above.

What kinds of skills or abilities do you offer as assets to your community?

How would you describe your relationships or connections with your neighbors? This can include people who live nearby on your street or people in the larger Charlotte community.

In what ways could you depend on any of your neighbors for help in an emergency?

What community organizations or clubs are you involved with in Charlotte? Please list the organization and a primary reason you are a member.

What challenges or conflicts does your neighborhood face?

In what ways can the challenges you described be resolved?

In what ways do you and your neighbors think similarly about life in Charlotte?
In what ways do you and your neighbors think differently about life in Charlotte?

Why do you think people choose to live in Charlotte?
Interview guide (David A. Riley thesis project)

Intro script

[check for consent to record]

Thank you for meeting with me! As we discussed through email, I’m conducting follow-up interviews with several of the participants in the Dec. 2 storytelling workshop. I have two main reasons for the interviews. First, now that a few weeks have passed, I’m interested in hearing about your lasting impressions and recollections of the workshop. As part of that assessment, I’d also like to ask some follow-up questions to your responses on the questionnaire you completed following the workshop. Secondly, I’m interested in hearing more about some of the stories that you shared during the workshop as I develop a written narrative about the event.

If you have any questions, think I’m misunderstanding something you said, or missing anything important about the workshop, please say so -- my main goal is to understand what you took away from the workshop, and I’d like your honest feedback. If you’d rather not answer any question I ask, please say so and I will move on -- while I’d like your feedback, there is no need to explain if you don’t wish to do so.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Overall/holistic understanding

Now that a few weeks have passed, what is the main impression that the storytelling workshop left with you?

What stories or remarks shared by other participants have stuck with you or still readily come to mind when you think about the workshop? Why do you think these stuck with you?

Did you learn anything new about the neighborhood or people who live here during the workshop?

Follow-up probes:
What did you learn about what others value in the neighborhood?
What did you learn about how others perceive the neighborhood or specific places in it?
Did you learn anything new or different about what others hope or envision for the future of the neighborhood?

Social capital

Do you feel that the storytelling workshop helped you to make a connection of some kind with some of the other participants? If so, how would you describe that connection?
Did the storytelling workshop help make you more aware of existing connections with other people or existing support networks in your neighborhood?

Did you feel uncomfortable at any time during the workshop? Could you describe how so?

Several of the participants asked me to share their contact information with the rest of the group so they could keep in touch; others exchanged contact information directly. Do you think you will stay in touch with anyone from the storytelling group? If so, can you describe in what way you might be interested in contacting or being contacted by another participant or participants? Have you been in touch with any of the other participants since the workshop?

Did you make similar connections with people in your group at the recent charrette? What was different or similar about the connections you made at the two events? Did the format of each event lead to different types of connections?

What binds or connects people in Charlotte? Did the storytelling workshop demonstrate this to you in any way?

Assets

The questionnaires for the workshop asked people to list assets in the neighborhood. Did the storytelling workshop change your thinking about what an asset can be? If so, how?

Did you learn about issues or challenges that you hadn’t thought about before?

Workshop vs. charrette

The workshop and the charrette you participated in were very different processes. The formats and goals of the processes were different, for example, and so were the time commitments. I’m interested in understanding whether people found the outcomes of the two experiences to be different. How would you say the storytelling workshop differed from the charrette?

Do you think you learned different things in the charrette and storytelling workshop? If so, what differed?

Do you think the storytelling workshop added anything to the charrette experience? If so, what?

Questions specific to participant’s stories and/or questionnaire responses

Participant 1: You shared the story of how you first got involved at the lighthouse, but I wondered if you could share more about what attracts you to that particular building. There are other places of historical importance in Charlotte -- what is it specifically about the lighthouse?
“Rough” reputation - where do you think that comes from? Is it specific to Charlotte or were you referring to the city in general in the perception of some people from the suburbs?

You talked about the roots of the perception that Charlotte has not been welcoming to people of color. Participant 13 then talked a bit about how this wasn’t unique to Charlotte. Do you think Charlotte has moved past that kind of thinking? Do you think Charlotte still has work to do? Do we need to address this as part of planning for the neighborhood’s future?

Snug Harbor -- you noted police officer told you a majority of calls were for one couple -- why did you point this out?

Bill Davis -- a “pain in the ass” -- how is being a “pain in the ass” a neighborhood asset?

**Participant 2:** You talked about the water and land in both questionnaires, but you seemed to emphasize the natural environment more in the post-questionnaire. You also spoke about the connection you feel to the land during the workshop. Did the workshop bring this connection or value to the forefront of your mind in a way it wasn’t before you participated in the workshop? How did this compare to the charrette? Did the storytelling process reinforce and/or strengthen this connection and value? Can you describe whether or how your thinking about this connection or value changed during and after the workshop, if at all?

Did you get as much chance to address the natural environment during the charrette? Did the charrette address the natural environment and/or river gorge specifically?

Did the discussion about the natural environment bring to mind any ways to incorporate its preservation or access to it more directly into neighborhood planning?

You said you used to live near the lake in another town -- did you feel as much of a connection with the natural environment there? What’s the difference if there is one?

Discussion about Leadership Academy for Young Men -- does neighborhood need to address the misperceptions you described of seeing all the kids there as riffraff? Did that come up during charrette? Should that be part of a neighborhood plan -- or at least more cooperation?

**Participant 3:** No specific follow-up questions.

**Participant 4:** You grew up here -- when did you leave? Did you feel the kind of connection that you described to the lake with any other natural setting/environment?

You mentioned that you just joined the CCA -- what made you decide to join? What are you doing or hoping to do with them? Why did you describe the CCA as an asset?

Please explain or describe a “God walk,” as you referred to it during the exercise.
Participant 5: In your follow-up questionnaire, you mentioned surprise at how some participants spoke about Snug Harbor and Charlotte High School. What specifically surprised you? Was this the first time you’d heard these types of stories or perceptions about Snug Harbor and the high school? Could the workshop have been improved by focusing more on those types of stories or finding ways to develop solutions?

You also mentioned that descriptions of the natural beauty in Charlotte resonated with you and helped you realize that you sometimes take that beauty for granted. You also mentioned some assets in the post-questionnaire that you didn’t in the first, including natural beauty, but also its potential to be an environmentally-friendly visitor hub, underutilized buildings near the port. Do you think these are things you were already aware of and the workshop reminded you of them, or did the workshop help you recognize assets that you didn’t recognize before? Did you have a similar experience learning about what your neighbors value during the charrette? Do you think the storytelling process was any more or less likely than the charrette to reveal this type of perception or value?

You mentioned that a couple of people got into the weeds in their remarks. Could the storytelling workshop have been improved in any way to prevent what you saw as tangents?

In your response to the first question about naming a place of particular importance to you in Charlotte, you noted that we talk a lot about living in bubbles, and said this is one bubble you don’t mind. What makes a good bubble versus a bad bubble?

Is the beach particularly valuable to you mainly as a point of connection with your family and memories of your family? Did I understand that correctly?

Why do you think people view Charlotte as so far away?

Why do you think Charlotte has a branding problem, as you described it?

You’ve lived outside Charlotte. Have you found that village feel elsewhere, where everyone seems to know each other?

Participants 6 + 7 (interviewed together): Participant 6 talked about enjoying looking at the water and being out by the lake when the winds change directions. What is it about the lake that’s appealing to look at and experience? If you lived in a more rural area, as you considered, you could look at the forest or fields. Would that be as nice to look at?

During the conversation on myths about Charlotte, Participant 6 mentioned you weren’t sure if your children were happy when you decided to move to Charlotte. Why is that?

You both spoke quite a bit about problems at Snug Harbor. It sounded like you had one bad experience directly -- someone took and tossed some plants you had outside. Is this right? How else did Snug Harbor affect you while it was in operation?
Some other participants pushed back on some of what you said about Snug Harbor -- some folks suggested it was probably a small fraction of the people who lived there and caused police calls; another person said we should try not to stereotype everyone there. Similarly, after you talked about some of past issues with students from Charlotte High, I think some of the other participants emphasized that it was probably a minority of the students who caused problems and gave everyone else a bad name. I don’t know that you had a chance to reflect or respond further to that, so I thought I’d ask now if you have any other thoughts on the subjects, or whether the discussion changed your thinking at all about either subject.

At one point, another participant said she thought some of the language we often use to talk about people who live at places like Snug Harbor -- like “a bad element” -- is often used to describe people of other races, non-white people. Again, I’m not sure you had a chance to respond to that at the time, and I thought I’d ask what you thought about that remark.

There was some talk about trying to do some outreach to people at Snug Harbor, once it has residents again, to get them more involved in the community, to see them more as part of the community. Do you think that’s a worthwhile idea? Is it something you’d considered or tried yourselves in the past, before the workshop?

Nature theme -- wild nature of the gorge -- something you already valued coming into the workshop? Did you know many other people felt similarly?

**Participant 8:** You mentioned that you’re now living in the house where you grew up. What drew you back there from New York City?

You brought up parking lots during the myth discussion, said you love them. What is the myth about them specifically? Do you think the lots are actually an asset? Is that contrary to what you heard in the charrette?

You picked up on the term “riffraff” that another participant used when talking about kids who hang out at the beach and in the parking lot. You described yourself as one of the riffraff when you were a kid, and said you at least haven’t seen anything really bad going on there, just kids hanging out. Do you remember why you keyed in on that term?

You used the words “gentle and organic” when you were describing the type of development you’d like to see in Charlotte. A number of other people picked up on that terminology. What do you envision when you use those words?

**Participant 9:** Was unable to schedule an interview.

**Participant 10:** You spoke during the workshop about stereotyping people who live at Snug Harbor and the use of language like “not the best element” as racial code words. Was it useful to air that problem during the workshop? Could the workshop have addressed it differently? Are
there things we as planners or as a neighborhood do to better confront and deal with these stereotypes and/or misperceptions, particularly in regards to race? Was there any discussion of race during the charrette for your group?

What drew you back to Charlotte from out of state?

Please further describe your childhood visits to Turning Point -- did you grow up in the neighborhood? Why Turning Point and not another park? What drew your family there?

You talked about the perception that Charlotte is an upscale area. Others mentioned that too. At the same time, people talked about the perception that it’s a rough place, or at least that people are afraid of the beach area because they think teenagers are fighting there all the time. Are these two reputations at odds? How do you reconcile them? From whom have you heard the idea that it’s an upscale suburb? If it isn’t that, what is Charlotte, then?

Participant 11: Did not conduct an interview.

Participant 12: Holy Cross Church came up as a place of particular importance to you. That wasn’t something that I recall coming up during the charrette. Should planning for the neighborhood take into consideration the role of community and religious organizations like Holy Cross? Did you gain a new understanding of other assets in the neighborhood? Do you see Holy Cross as a larger source of social connection in the neighborhood?

Discussion of Charlotte Strong -- my impression is you perceived some tension in the community about Charlotte Strong and felt its work was misunderstood. Is addressing that tension an important part of the neighborhood planning process? Did the workshop provide a forum to address that tension? How could it have done so more effectively and what could resolve that tension or misunderstanding?

Misperception of Charlotte as a rich neighborhood because of the lake mansions; you described it as a blue collar neighborhood, with many workers from Kodak. Do you think addressing that misperception is important for planning for the neighborhood’s future? Why? Is the fact that this is a mixed-income neighborhood potentially an asset? How so?

Can you spell the last name of the WWII veteran you mentioned? During the charrette, did you think of people as neighborhood assets? Should we think of people as assets?

Participant 13: You arrived a bit late and missed the first prompt about naming a place of particular importance to you in Charlotte - not a place that you think is important to larger community, but important to you personally. Can be a positive or negative importance, but a strong connection for you. Can you answer that prompt now?

What brought you back to this area from New York City? Why Charlotte in particular?
Re: urban myths, you focused on the neighborhood’s connections to abolition, including the place where you live, St. Bernard’s. Why were these stories of particular importance for you to share? Did you have an opportunity to get into this type of history during the charrette?

There seemed to be an enthusiastic response to that story. Several participants mentioned it in their post-questionnaires. What was it like for you to share that story and hear the response? Did that experience have any impact on your follow-up plans?

You also spoke about the neighborhood’s reputation as being racist. Did the storytelling workshop offer a way to start discussing and better understanding this problem? Could the workshop have been improved by focusing more on those types of stories or finding ways to develop solutions?

You seemed to make a few connections with others during the workshop. Do you think the storytelling process helped you make these connections, or was this just a group of people that was easy to get to know? Were these connections you could have made through the charrette or a different type of process, or was there something about the storytelling process that made it possible? Have you been in touch with these folks at all since the workshop?

Did the workshop clarify or make you think any differently about your own role in the community? About yourself as an asset to Charlotte?
Collaborative narrative
May 2018

Place-Based Storytelling as a Foundation for Neighborhood Planning and Community Development

Introduction

We all have stories to tell about the places where we live. These stories impart important information about our neighborhoods and communities – what we love and value, what we’d change if we could, what we find enriching or frustrating about life in this particular place.

This report summarizes the results of a research project exploring how people might use these types of stories to better plan for a neighborhood’s future.

The research focused on Charlotte, the northernmost neighborhood in Rochester, N.Y, on the banks of Lake Ontario and the Genesee River. Thirteen residents, including people who have lived in Charlotte all their lives and more recent transplants to the neighborhood, came together in late 2017 for a facilitated storytelling workshop where they shared stories about living here.

Their insights showed that this type of storytelling can indeed be a powerful tool for better understanding a community and its residents, and for identifying its strengths and challenges. David Riley, a Rochester resident and former journalist, designed and facilitated this exercise as part of a thesis project for a master’s degree in urban planning at the University at Buffalo. The project was a response to planning and community development research that suggests there is value in collecting residents’ stories, but offers limited examples of how to do this in a practical, hands-on way.

David developed his project in tandem with a charrette, an intensive participatory planning process, which was held in Charlotte in November 2017. This was done mainly to compare how the results of storytelling might differ from established methods for engaging the public in neighborhood planning. The Community Design Center Rochester, which led the charrette, and the Charrette Day Steering Committee agreed to allow David to recruit charrette participants for his workshop. This report is intended in part as a supplement to the Port of Rochester and Charlotte Community Charrette Report released in February 2018, which details themes from the charrette.

The 13 participants met at the Charlotte Branch Library on Dec. 2, 2017. David led the discussion, which lasted about two hours and was structured around four prompts, which asked residents to share stories on various topics related to neighborhood life. The project relied on pre- and post-event questionnaires and one-on-one interviews to assess the participants’ impressions of the workshop, as well as analyses of their stories and CDCR’s charrette report released in February 2018.

This narrative also is a means of assessing the workshop. This text was provided to all participants, who were invited to edit or correct its summaries and findings as they saw fit. The final version reflects not just one researcher’s interpretation of the stories shared, but the storytellers’ interpretations, too.
Stories About Places of Importance

Workshop attendees were asked to share stories about places of personal importance to them in Charlotte. The lake, river and Ontario Beach Park emerged as critical assets for many participants. Others also listed Turning Point Park, Holy Cross Church and the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse.

Many of the same iconic places came up during the charrette. But the stories shared at the workshop explained how and why these places matter to Charlotte residents and revealed the deep meaning they hold for some people.

For some speakers, the lake and river were not only recreational and environmental resources, but places of deep emotional, religious and spiritual meaning. Others ascribed similar meaning to the connection they felt to nature in wilder parts of the neighborhood, including the river gorge.

‘It’s all woods behind me, and I love living there. I love the land, the river. I’m sorry to get emotional, because it just – it’s a good emotion. I love the land. I talk to the trees, I talk to the water, the river, the ground that I’m walking on, the history. I like being outside, I love being down by the lake … It’s happy tears.’

Participants also described finding connections to family traditions and personal history at the beach, park and pier. These also are places where people find space for introspection and reflection.

‘Every positive and negative thing, or mental health time, has happened with me at the beach, walking the pier or walking along the boardwalk.’

‘My parents loved to fish, and one time, [Dad] brought me up out to the end of the pier, and we salmon fished. And then that kind of became a thing when I’d come back from Arizona. I’d get up early with Dad … we’d drive and go fishing out on the end of the pier. And so my little granddaughter was just here a couple weeks ago, and I took her fishing, and we went to the end of the pier.’

‘I don’t know anyplace else where you can go out so far into the middle of the water and turn around 360 degrees and gasp and gasp and gasp at the beauty. … I’ve probably ironed out every significant part of my life on that pier. It’s where I go to think. It’s where I get perspective. It’s where I’m not crowded by things.’

Other residents described a fascination with hidden aspects of the neighborhood’s past. This included its unique geological history as well as more recent events. Others saw Charlotte’s history as something to share with visitors to the neighborhood – a means of connecting and sharing with others.
'One of the more interesting aspects of Turning Point Park is the remains of the industry that used to be on the river banks there. And if you walk down right onto the shore, you can still see the foundations of buildings that used to be there. ... Different kinds of prosperous industry there, and it's all overgrown now, and you've got to poke around quite a bit to find a lot of this stuff.'

Holy Cross Church held significance as a house of worship, but also as a neighborhood gathering place – a tight-knit community where people connect with neighbors, friends and family.

**Stories that Debunk Myths About the Neighborhood**

Workshop participants were asked to share stories about myths or common misperceptions about the neighborhood. In some cases, participants turned myths on their head, revealing perceived challenges as potential strengths of the neighborhood. Participants also shared stories about real challenges, and sometimes differed in their interpretations of these problems.

The charrette addressed neighborhood concerns, too, but often in different ways. The charrette largely dealt with concerns about the form and function of the physical environment, such as street design, land use and revitalizing underused buildings. The charrette also addressed concerns about neighborhood branding and a lack of year-round activity to draw people here. There is a prevailing notion that Charlotte will never be vibrant outside of the summertime.

The storytelling workshop often highlighted different concerns. These included perceptions about people who live here, whether this is a safe place, and whether certain groups of people are welcome here. Addressing these issues is no less important in planning for the neighborhood’s future.

A common theme was Charlotte’s reputation as a “rough” place. Participants said limited problems with fights or scuffles near the beach have caused the neighborhood to be mischaracterized. This did not align with their experiences here, living among helpful neighbors who look out for one another.

‘*My girlfriend and especially her husband told me that because I live totally alone, that I should not buy that house, that it would be very unsafe. And for months, my girlfriend called me. I had to call her every time I walked the boardwalk or went to a concert, because she thought for sure I was never even going to make it home alive. And I just – I haven’t found that. Like I said, I live alone. My neighbors, they are rock stars. They have taken care of me.*’

In somewhat of a contradiction with that rough reputation, Charlotte also is seen sometimes as a neighborhood of expensive lake homes, rather than one that also has working- and middle-class residents, according to some participants. Others said Charlotte is seen as heavily suburbanized and lacking green space. People offered more stories about their connections to the river gorge.
‘I know that a lot of people who don’t live here drive up north on Lake Avenue and once you get past the cemeteries, they see house, house, house, house, house, house. And that’s kind of the perception of Charlotte – which it pretty much is, but then I start telling my wildlife stories about deer walking through our front yard, and turkeys, and coyotes. ... The fact that the gorge is deceptively close to Lake Avenue, I don’t think people realize it is only a couple, just a few houses there, and all of a sudden, boom, and you’re into this territory where deer are constantly walking around and skunks and all kinds of wildlife.’

Other participants shared stories not about myths, but problems they experienced living near Snug Harbor Court, a townhouse complex that lost its Certificate of Occupancy in 2015 over longstanding code violations. New owners have been renovating it. The speakers described concerns about crime and hundreds of police calls at the complex. One man said he was hopeful that new owners investing in the property would do a better job of screening tenants and keep out the riffraff.

‘We were just talking to one of our police officers who’s on our beat and knows us pretty well. He stopped by the other day – we were working in the yard, and we were talking about Snug Harbor. He goes, “Oh yeah, some nights I used to dread coming on a shift because I knew I was going to be there two or three times that night.”’

This led to discussion of whether renters at the complex – as well as other people seen as negative influences in the community – are unfairly stereotyped because of the misdeeds of a few. It was noted that many renters at Snug Harbor relied on public assistance for housing.

‘In connection to this ‘bad element,’ aka what we covertly describe as race ... I think sometimes that’s a code word. ... [Low-income renters] deserve to have a decent place to live as well, so we don’t necessarily want to kick them out, but we deserve to be safe and comfortable. I think it’s tough trying to satisfy all parts of it – making sure that they have a nice place to live, but not disrupting the residents who are there, and not stereotyping, grouping everyone together.’

Some participants raised similar concerns about the view that students who attend a neighborhood high school have at times been troublemakers. One woman shared a story of riding a public bus full of high school students whom she found to be polite and helpful, contrary to generalizations about them.
‘All of them got up, said, ‘Miss, can I help you with the dog? Can I help you with your bag?’ And they got up from the seats in the front, all of them. I just needed one seat, but they all got up, and they moved back. I asked where they were from. I also substitute teach – I haven’t done it there, but I want to do it there because of the experience I had with the young men on that bus. … I’m going to say probably 1 percent of them were causing all the trouble, and all the rest of them just got labeled with it.’*

A few participants agreed these kinds of stories suggest a need to find ways to better integrate renters and students into neighborhood life, if possible.

Participants also shared stories about the neighborhood’s reputation on race. A woman who described herself as mixed race said the neighborhood is incorrectly perceived as unwelcoming to people of color, partially due to controversy about a panel on the antique carousel at the beach, which featured a caricature of two Black children. It was removed in 2016 and placed in a traveling museum exhibit.

‘The urban myth is that Charlotte is white privileged, not welcoming to people of color from the city, because of that. … It really upset people and that it was allowed to be there all this time until we came and said, ‘It’s got to be removed.’ So that’s the perception. That’s an urban myth. Living here, I know it’s not so.’*

Another participant saw some historical basis to the neighborhood’s reputation, though others noted that incidents of racial tension also occurred elsewhere in Rochester and the U.S. in the 1960s and ‘70s.

‘I don’t think it’s a myth. It is a remnant, that we were not, that this neighborhood is not welcoming to people of color. I was going to school downtown … while I was going to school then in 7th and 8th grade, there were race riots in Charlotte. They were busing kids in and there was a bunch of crap, and that’s where all that comes from. So I think that there’s a basis for it. I think we’ve improved. We probably still have a lot to go.’

On other topics, participants refuted myths that Charlotte is too distant from the rest of the city to visit, or that there is little to do there. Speakers also discussed historic connections that the neighborhood may have to the Underground Railroad, but which have yet to be verified and documented. Others said Charlotte Strong, a citizens group viewed by some as troublemakers, had in fact provided an important voice for residents who opposed a major development proposal at the Port of Rochester.

* Stories shared by Yvonne Koketsko Ferreira.
One speaker said there is a common misconception that it is up to Charlotte residents alone to decide what happens at the waterfront. He described the waterfront area as a regional resource.

‘This area, I have learned through all of the research that I have done, it’s very much a responsibility of everyone in Monroe County, not just Charlotte, in terms of how it’s developed, how it’s shaped, how it grows and so on.’

Stories About People and Organizations as Assets, Too

The third prompt in the workshop invited participants to share stories about people, organizations or events that made a significant impact on the neighborhood during their lifetimes.

People shared stories about civic groups, businesses, neighbors, advocates, public servants and elected leaders who have shaped Charlotte for the better. The participants also identified what made these people and organizations valuable – tenacity, responsiveness, empathy, hard work and institutional knowledge, among other qualities.

Their stories drove home the point that people, social networks and organizations are assets to the community, and can be as important as brick-and-mortar assets in driving neighborhood change.

Subjects included the Charlotte Community Association and Northwest Neighborhood Service Center, both of which helped answer her questions about forming a tenants’ association at an apartment complex. Another woman spoke about the public library and its friendly staff.

Participants also spoke about advocates who helped create or protect neighborhood landmarks. They included Bill Davis, who worked to preserve the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse and Turning Point Park, and Jack Foy, who helped get the Battle of the Bulge Memorial installed at Ontario Beach Park.

‘When you live your life like water, you go where there’s the least amount of resistance. Bill was not the place you went. So I think to a large, large extent, that park down at Turning Point Park and the lighthouse owe a huge debt to Bill.’

Several people credited Molly Clifford, the City Council representative for the city’s northwest quadrant, for advocating on the neighborhood’s behalf and bringing together people to work out problems. Others talked about neighbors who helped introduce them to the neighborhood and its civic groups.

One woman spoke about an experience with firefighters who work out of a firehouse in Charlotte.

‘My grandmother was a hundred and a half when she died, and she was in her house almost up until the end. She had a lot of problems and they were there very frequently helping her out, transporting her. And I know they were doing their job, but they did it in such a way that they calmed her down. She was very scared, and
they were very personal, and they made the experience as best they could for her, and I appreciate that. It’s a nice neighborhood feel, especially for her at the end.’

Another man spoke about the information that elders have to offer the neighborhood.

‘In terms of history of the area and things that have happened, and in general, I’m talking about any of the older folks. Man, get their information before they pass on, because it’s just unbelievably valuable.’

Other participants focused on businesses. A woman spoke about Abbott’s, the iconic frozen custard shop on Beach Avenue, as a touchstone for her family traditions. Another participant talked about the bartenders at Mr. Dominic’s, who know a great deal about Charlotte from chatting with customers.

Stories About Charlotte’s Future

The final prompt asked participants to share stories about what Charlotte will be like in 25 to 50 years. Most participants described visions for the neighborhood as a place that balances the needs of existing residents with attracting additional visitors. There was a general desire for Charlotte to grow and thrive, but without sacrificing its small-town or village character; at the same time, there was some wariness of the direction of future development.

This portion of the workshop often echoed themes that emerged at the charrette, but helped to clarify or provide additional detail about them.

‘Twenty-five years from now, I think Charlotte will be much like Niagara-on-the Lake. I think we’re going to have all kinds of shops down here. We’ll have entertainment. Hopefully we’ll get an aquarium in down there, too. We’ll have things that are open year-round. We’ll be working with Greece and Irondequoit to find things to do, like cross-country skiing like over in Irondequoit in Durand Park, and maybe over here in Greece, we can have like dockside races or something, you know? ... And be open to the public, still open to the public, not private, and thriving. Many, many jobs.’**

** Story shared by Maureen Staves.
‘I would hope that in 25 years, there would be some development that would be non-intrusive, yet make it more accessible to people. What that is, I’m not sure, because you know, the minute you open the door to real estate developers, all hell breaks loose.’

Another participant said she hoped to see a “kind and gentle and organic development” of the neighborhood, a phrase that several people subsequently echoed. Others said they want development that helps to showcase and improve access to Charlotte’s history and natural resources. Another hoped to see boutique shops and more activity in underutilized buildings like the Port of Rochester Terminal Building and the Roger Robach Community Center. One woman hoped to see the waterfront converted into a pedestrian zone accessible mainly by trolley or water taxi.

Other speakers focused on the neighborhood’s composition and civic life. One participant said she hoped to see more diversity in the neighborhood. Another hoped to see the Charlotte Community Association become a “vibrant, huge life-breathing place” for volunteering and civic engagement.

‘We’ve seemed to come together, many of us never having met before, and I think this community draws people who want to live in a place like that, and who want to be connected to their neighbors and who can rely on their neighbors.’

Speakers pondered other types of change. One woman said that as the climate changes, a region like Rochester could see an influx of population; she worried that this could make Charlotte prohibitively expensive for existing residents. Another wondered if Charlotte would become more suburban, even perhaps merging with a neighboring town.

Conclusions and Limitations

It is clear that a storytelling exercise such as this could add value to a public engagement process like a charrette. In follow-up interviews, several participants described the storytelling workshop as comfortable or intimate, allowing them to discuss feelings and ideas openly and to establish connections with others. A number said that adding a storytelling component to or before the charrette might have helped them to understand and begin establishing trust with other charrette participants.

‘If you don’t have some background like that, you don’t understand why this person is thinking this way and this person is thinking that way, and what’s driving those thoughts. If you don’t have a reasonable understanding of those things, you’re going to have a hard time coming to a successful compromise.’
‘Everybody telling their story gave me a personal connection to them. ... The charrette was all business. ... I downplayed more of what I wanted to personally get out of it so I could focus on the big project. But at the storytelling thing, that’s where we got to open up our personalities and say things and make connections.’

Another participant said storytelling helped her to understand not just potential uses for land in the neighborhood, but the value that residents place on that land.

‘It was, you know, how much it meant to people’s hearts, as opposed to what to do with it.’

Other interviewees said they learned about new assets or challenges at the storytelling workshop. Common themes included other participants’ love and appreciation for the neighborhood; the value of the wilderness of the river gorge; positive and negative perceptions of race in Charlotte; the connection to nature described by several participants; the concept of people as assets for community building.

Yet some participants made clear that while they found the storytelling experience worthwhile, they did not necessarily see major differences in the themes it explored and those that emerged at the charrette. Some also clearly saw the charrette as a much more important means of building connections among residents and developing community consensus around development in Charlotte – as would be expected, given that it was a much larger and more involved process.

While the storytelling project also explored whether this process could help people to build social connections, there was limited evidence that this brief session did so. A few people had contacted each other after the event, but most had not. A longer or multi-day exercise might produce different results.

Some of the storytelling prompts could be refined. The question about myths, for example, could be more specific about what types of misunderstandings the participants should address.

It is important to note that this project involved a self-selected group of participants who may have been especially plugged into discussions about neighborhood and civic life. Segments of the community who are not usually part of these conversations may have very different insights to offer.
Recommendations

For planners conducting public engagement for neighborhood-level projects in general:

1.) Consider implementing small storytelling groups as a voluntary activity to frame an engagement process. Alternately, incorporate storytelling techniques into the larger engagement event. For example, the first hour of the CDCR charrette largely dealt with introductions and preliminary discussion of each group’s task. A simple storytelling prompt – perhaps asking participants to share a place of importance to them – could help to establish trust and common ground among participants during that first hour.

2.) Consider neighborhood-based storytelling as a standalone community building exercise for community groups and other neighborhood civic organizations.

3.) Consider cataloguing neighborhood stories as part of larger neighborhood planning or community development projects.

For neighborhood leaders and/or planners working in Charlotte:

1.) Consider ways to better incorporate the river gorge into plans for the waterfront area. This could include river-themed activities or events extending from Turning Point Park to the port along the Genesee Riverway Trail, enhancing wayfinding to access points to the trail, and/or adding historical markers and/or interpretive signs along the Riverway trail.

2.) Consider including in neighborhood plans additional programming and interventions that would complement the depth of meaning that residents ascribe to the lake, river and Ontario Beach Park. This could include incorporating additional green and civic spaces into the port area immediately adjacent to either body of water, and/or a larger portfolio of tours, activities and outdoor classes that highlight this area’s history and natural resources.

3.) Consider supporting or enhancing the Charlotte Community Association’s efforts to build relationships with students at the Leadership Academy for Young Men (former Charlotte High School) to better incorporate these students into neighborhood life, reduce potential conflicts with residents and recognize this youth population as an untapped resource.

4.) Consider outreach to establish relationships with the new owners of the former Snug Harbor Court complex and its tenants to better incorporate them into neighborhood life and reduce potential for future conflicts.

5.) Build community-building projects and activities directly into any neighborhood plan in order to tap assets represented by Charlotte’s civic groups, advocates and residents. This might, for example, include developing a volunteer program to assist elder homeowners with basic home repairs. High school student volunteers could be trained by skilled resident volunteers to help with repairs. This would provide a valuable service for Charlotte’s homeowners and equip teens with trade skills and community service experience.
References


