The Myth and Reality of Portland's Engaged Citizenry and Process-Oriented Governance

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It is widely accepted that Portland is a city of engaged citizens, and that government agencies routinely involve citizens in public policy debates and public works, even at times at great cost and considerable frustration.

In *Better Together*, Robert Putnam dedicates an entire chapter to Portland where there has been, in his words, "a positive epidemic of civic engagement." Putnam argues that in the early 1970s metropolitan Portland looked virtually identical to other US metropolitan areas (including Seattle) in civic terms. Two decades later Portland suburbs, by Putnam's measure, were roughly two to three times more civic than comparable suburbs elsewhere, and Portland proper had become roughly three to four times more civic than comparable US cities**.** For example, in 1974, 21 percent of Portlanders attended at least one public meeting on town or school affairs, compared to 22 percent for residents in comparable cities. By the early 1990s, the figure for the rest of the country was 11 percent, whereas in Portland it had risen to 30-35%.

The exceptionalism of Portland's civic life is one significant reason for the city's reputation as a well-planned city with a lively downtown and a strong creative community. Newspaper reporters and magazine writers have praised Portland as a "progressive" place where all the neighborhoods are handsome, the new development respectful of its context, and all the planners are above average.

However, trouble is brewing in Puddletown. An examination of civic trends since the 1950s in Portland suggests the upward surge of civic participation Putnam documented has begun to slow. While some indicators, as Putnam documents, reflects Portland's strong civic life, public discourse has become more contentious, and the City of Portland itself has undercut support for citizen involvement programs.

There's a sense that many civic issues are polarized, with wide uncivil divisions between citizens, and between citizens and local government. Among the divisions are urban vs. rural, central city vs. suburbs, west vs. east Multnomah County (clearly split by recent vote for an additional tax to save schools). There are new urban enclaves that make electoral consensus over critical issues difficult, such as reverse commuters who live in downtown and work in Silicon Forest west of Portland supporting culture and Starbucks but not necessarily schools and social services. There are many ways to divide Portlanders, but so few effective ways to bridge these differences that Portland is on the brink of losing its civic exceptionalism.

Portland's rise in civic stature is extraordinary by any standard. It is even more astounding if you picture Portland in the 1950s, a strikingly dull and derivative city, only a restaurant or two above a logging town. Civic Portland circa 1950s is summed up by a photograph of Portland's Redevelopment Board, a predecessor to the Portland Development Commission, Portland's urban renewal agency: all men, sitting around a rectangular table, in suit and ties, ashtrays lined up like today's water bottles. It was a Pleasantville kind of place, if you were male, white, Christian, and patriotic. Urban renewal, a tool the city has used to spectacular effect in the last three decades, was itself

suspect in those days. A city commissioner at the time noted that it was "the very essence of communism."

In the 1950s over 60 percent of all the civic organizations in Portland were clubs: women's clubs, ethnic social clubs, fraternities and sororities. There was a virtual army of women roaming the civic byways in those days: 600 women's clubs, with at least 18,000 (about 1 out 10 women in Portland) members involved in civic activities. The repertoire of civic actions in the 1950s of civic organizations was relatively limited. In a news sample from 1960 (still soundly the 1950s in terms of civic life) the largest reported activities was the election of officers, accounting for 25%, and education forums, (33%). The two types activities accounted for 58% of all the reported news by civic groups. Other traditional civic actions included fundraising, benefits, honors and awards, made up an additional 29% of the news. The remainder of activities (13%) included a handful of advocacy actions, neighborhood actions, participation in hearings, and conducting studies or developing plans—all actions that became much more important to civic players during and after the civic reconstruction period (1967—1975). Even as late as 1972, the Oregon Journal summarized the activities of women's clubs, in terms of the good will generated by raising "funds from bake sales, rummage sales or book sales with proceeds earmarked for hospitals, schools, nursing homes, or any of a thousand other places where there's a need." The editors also noted, that "along with self improvement the professionally oriented women is concerned about her community. Climbing the business ladder is vertical, but alert and aware women are constantly challenged to reach out horizontally to help others."

The city was run by white men. Citizen involvement was achieved through rounding up the usual elites, professionals, and elected officials. Abbott summarizes the process of neighborhood planning between 1957 and 1967: "as straightforward as its content. City Planning Commission reports make no reference to neighborhood groups or citizen involvement. They were prepared by city employees for their colleagues in city hall.... During Terry Schrunk's first three terms as mayor [1957--1972] planners worked from the top down, applying professional values and expertise to small-scale problems and informing local residents of the resulting proposals." An examination of city authorized citizen involvement through commissions, boards, and advisory committees, reveals no participation by minorities. In fact a 1967 City Club (City Club, 1967) report on race in Portland identified only one civic body, other than the emerging Model Cities Program, that had Black representation. This was the Metropolitan Relations Commission, which the City Club committee accused of being a public relations arm of the Mayor's office. Women likewise were dramatically underrepresented in civic politics. Of the 711 members of civic bodies in 1960, 591 were men (71%). Women were also channeled into specific civic niches. Of the total of 120 women on civic boards in 1960, about half (58 out of 120) served on five commissions: The Arts Commission, Metropolitan Youth Commission, Zoo Commission, Pittock Mansion Commission, and Japanese Garden Commission, all valued civic institutions, but hardly comparable to more powerful commissions such as the Planning Commission, Portland Development Commission, or Housing Commission where there were only 10 women out of a total roster of 53.

Civic life in Portland went through a dramatic change in the later part of the 1960s, and early 1970s. The city endured civic unrest, in its own mild form commensurate with its mild climate and homogeneous population. As in the rest of the country during this time, anti-war protesters took to the street, and in Portland's diminutive "ghetto" in northeast Portland a couple of nights of unrest in the late 1960s, hardly comparable to the riots of back east cities, unsettled the establishment. A strike at Portland State College (now University) was put down with a show of force that pitted the civic establishment against the brokers of academic freedom; a curfew was established in certain city parks, and drug busts were increased to limit the insurgence of freedom loving young people, a part of the newly constituted "counter culture."

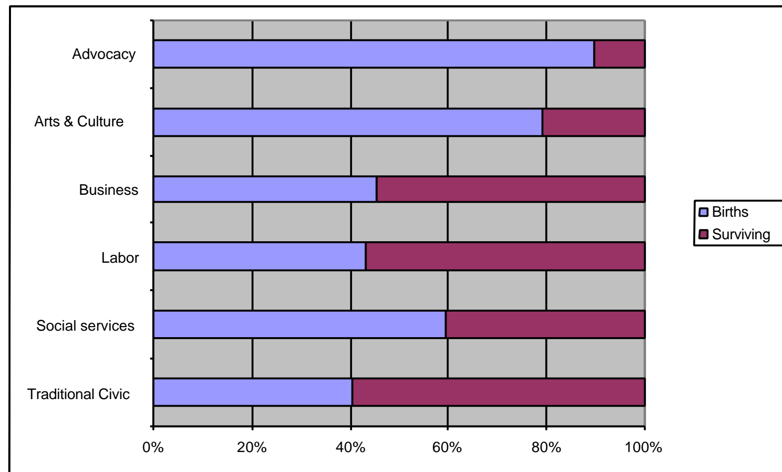
As in other communities, the more overt actions on the streets in the form of protests and demonstrations declined during the 1970s. The alumni of social movement activities in the 1960s, refocused their attention from demonstrations to institutionalizing social movement ideals by re-constituting the civic infrastructure of Portland. A comparison of the civic organization population in Portland between 1960 and 1972 reveals the dynamics of the civic revolution.

By 1972 traditional civic organizations still made up 30% of the total population

Total number of civic organizations in 1960 and 1972

	1960	*1972*	*Total Loss or Gain*
Advocacy	31	184	153
Arts & Culture	19	58	39
Business	174	195	21
Labor	164	172	8
Social Services	124	199	75
Traditional Civic	370	341	-29
TOTAL	882	1149	267

of civic groups in Portland, combined with labor (15% of the total population), and business associations (17%), the mainstay of traditional civic life accounted for 62% of the total population of civic groups. However, only looking at the total population of civic groups does not reveal the fundamental change underway in civic life in Portland. The most dramatic shift in the population of civic groups is the rise of advocacy groups, from 31 in 1960 to 184 in 1972, a four-fold increase. As Figure (*) shows, in 1972, the advocacy and arts and culture sectors were made up mostly of new organizations. The rest of the sectors were 50% or more survivors. The birth rate of advocacy was twice that of traditional civic organizations. The other sectors were made up of almost equal numbers of new groups and survivors. On the other hand, the total number of traditional civic associations that died between 1960 and 1972 (167) is nearly equal to the number of all other deaths combined (196). The dynamics of civic organizational population in Portland also reflects the civic tension that shows up in more careful analysis of civic events during this period. In simple terms, both traditional and the new civic worlds co-existed, sometimes in stubborn or belligerent opposition, and in other ways as though existing in parallel universes.



The alumni of the social movements, that in some ways worked together in an idealistic ether, and in other ways on separate identity and issue tracks (feminism, environment, minority rights), attempted at times to storm the gates of the existing civic institutions. But, for the most part they were turned away. It would take years for women and minorities to break regulatory boundaries, let alone more subtle social and psychological ones, to even enter civic spaces such as the City Club of Portland, or the exclusive social clubs such as the Arlington Club.

It is interesting to note that while the population of traditional civic organizations held their own in 1972 in terms of total numbers, a content analysis of news about civic organizations at the same time reveals how attention shifted away from traditional civic organizations. In 1960 advocacy organizations only accounted for 4% of the news while traditional civic groups accounted for 48% of the news. In1972 it is reversed, with advocacy accounting for 50% of the news, and traditional civic organizations only accounting for 7%. It is important to note, however, that the drop in news about traditional civic organizations was accompanied by a drop in the population of traditional civic groups. In contrast, the number of advocacy groups increased four-fold, while the

news about advocacy organizations increased over 12-fold.

The reconstruction of civic life in Portland was further propelled by new federal, state, and local programs like Model Cities, that mandated public participation.

Changing rules governing citizen's right to participate in public policy deliberations

Year	Rule
1946	Administrative Procedure Act requirement for review of governmental actions by affected parties
1954	Federal Urban Renewal act calls upon local advisory groups to be established
1964	Federal Economic Opportunity Act--anti-poverty boards created with maximum participation of residents of affected area
1966	Quie amendment: more specific anti-poverty boards at least 1/3 poor people
1966	Model Cities programs--Continues federal requirement that citizens be involved in federal programs
1966	Freedom of Information Act
1969	National environmental policy act: Requires citizen involvement in environmental impact assessments
1972	Clean Water Act: extensive citizen involvement procedures
1972	Oregon public meetings law--outlines rights of citizen to be notified of and be present at wide range of public meetings
1972	Coastal Zone management act with extensive procedures for citizen involvement
1972	Sierra Club v. Morton, eliminating the so called direct injury requirement, legitimizing class action suits
1973	Ford Foundation provides grants to establish public interest law firms
1973	Oregon Senate Bill State wide land use system with goal no. 1: citizen involvement
1974	Portland's neighborhood system implemented, providing city-wide rules and structure for citizen involvement
1974	Housing and Community Development Act, requiring citizen participation for local block grants
1974	Energy Reorganization act with extensive citizen involvement procedures
1979	Carter's Executive Order 12160calling for extensive participation in many federal programs

In 1964, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was created by Congress to lead the charge of President Johnson's War on Poverty. How cities around the country interpreted the new mandates for federal funding, that included facilitating maximum

participation of the affected residents, dramatically effected, not only the physical outcome of the urban renewal efforts, but also changed the local civic infrastructure.

The Albina neighborhood in northeast Portland was a model cities target area. In the early 1960s the Albina Neighborhood Council and the Community Council (previously, the Community Welfare Council) conducted an inventory and survey of agencies in the Northeast in order to develop a single proposal from Albina to secure OEO funding. In October 1964, a neighborhood service center for Albina was proposed, and an Albina Community Action Plan drawn up. The action plan was submitted to the Portland Metropolitan Steering Committee, Portland's newly formed overall coordinating body for OEO actions. In February 1965, the Albina group, referring to itself as the Albina Citizens War on Poverty Committee (ACWPC), was recognized as the official representative for OEO programs in Albina (Portland Planning Bureau, 1993).

The formation of the ACWPC, under the guidance of the Community Council, followed an interagency track to develop the Albina plan to combat poverty. The members of the original group were for the most part agency representatives, not lay citizens. It was expected that each participating agency would submit its own ideas and needs that would be consolidated into one overall application to the Federal OEO office. There were several well established agencies involved, including: the Greater Council of Churches, YMCA, YWCA, Albina Neighborhood Council, and the Portland Housing Authority (Gerald A. Frey, personal communication, November 11, 1964).

The plan originally adopted by the ACWPC was mostly developed by the interagency group established by the Community Council. In establishing the first official board of directors, ten members were a part of the original committee, representing

agencies, ten members were elected as representatives who lived in the target area, and ten more members were elected from across the city to bring experience and expertise to the board. Five member slots were left open in order to potentially increase the residential representation (Gerald A. Frey, personal communication, November 11, 1964).

On March 2, 1968, elections were held under the League of Women Voters supervision. This was an milestone event in the civic history of Portland: an election of everyday citizens to oversee spending federal funds, actions that in the past had been managed behind closed doors by Portland’s elected officials and civic elite. The election was announced on television, radio, and in newspapers. Even a sound truck circulated through the neighborhood urging voters to cast ballots. Two candidates canvassed their district. By day’s end, 1,781 residents out of a total of about 28,000, or 6.4 percent, voted. Of the 16 elected from the neighborhood, nine were Black. The mayor then appointed six Whites and five Blacks. The final composition of the board was described as: five unemployed women (two Black women from community organizations), a Black contractor, a White roofing contractor, two White bankers, two Black businessmen, two Black social workers, a Black deputy sheriff, a White lawyer, White printer, four clergymen (two Black), three elementary school teachers (two Black), a White educational administrator in a suburban school district, a Black housing director (in Albina), a Black job placement counselor at the Albina Neighborhood Center, and a White assistant commissioner of the Oregon Bureau of Labor. Twenty three of the 27 were residents of the model neighborhood.

At about the same time, under progressive major Neil Goldschmidt, the City of Portland institutionalized the emergent neighborhood movement by creating of the Office

of Neighborhood Offices, and legitimizing direct democratic action at the grassroots level by allowing organized neighbors to directly influence city policies, including, "any matter affecting livability of the neighborhood, including, but not limited to, land use, zoning, housing, community facilities, human resources, social and recreational programs, traffic and transportation, environmental quality, open spaces and parks." In just a matter of a few years, neighborhood associations had gone from unofficial status (at least outside Model City areas) to semi-official status with a stake in land use and social services issues, to having a legitimate stake in almost any activity in the association's geographic area of town. The number of neighborhood-based organizations grew rapidly during the 1970s so that by the end of the 1970s there were over 75 neighborhood associations, and a small army of activists was now armed with legitimacy and authority. During this time, through the new direct face-to-face democratic venue of neighborhoods, and through establishing more citizen advisory committees, the City of Portland created an open door policy that changed the expectation of citizens' relationship to their local government.

In 1973, the State of Oregon implemented its landmark state land-use planning policy—Senate Bill 100—whose first goal was citizen involvement. In order to develop a state-wide land zoning system as provided for in Senate Bill 100, the State embarked on a state-wide kind of Chautauqua. The state mailed out over 100,000 invitations to citizens to attend workshops in 35 locations. During 1975, over 10,000 people participated in the workshops, helping to shape the land use system, while also getting a crash course in land use and planning issues.

With the innovation of model cities grassroots approach to managing federal funds for impoverished areas, that included first and foremost the residents of the affected areas; one of the most comprehensive implementations of Jeffersonian direct democratic governance through the Portland neighborhood system; and the state-wide invitation to participate in creating a new land use system, citizen involvement took on a whole new meaning. In the 1950s, and before, citizen involvement meant to bring together the usual cast of elected officials and civic elite. After the reconstruction period in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Portlanders learned to expect much more. Citizens in Portland expected to be provided the opportunity to be involved in public policy on an on-going basis, not just to elect politicians to represent their interests.

The key magic potion that Putnam ponders about Portland's exemplary civic path may be explained by these civic innovations that created a common experience of direct democracy and open government. While the civic order was in upheaval, as clearly indicated first by social movement unrest, and then by an organizational ecological shift as dramatic as extinction of the dinosaurs, the emergent political leadership of Portland, took advantage of the rising tide of civic activism; rather than resisting the new forms of collective behavior, the activists were incorporated into a larger civic umbrella.

Content analysis of news media during the period reflects a shift from street activism to this new form of civic life. By the mid-1970s through to the mid-1980s civic news, in both the "straight" and "alternative" press was dominated by stories of citizens working together through neighborhood associations, serving on citizen advisory committees, and creating new nonprofit advocacy groups. In the late 1970s and1980s, three fourths of the news about neighborhood action was positive in the form of stories

about neighborhoods being saved, hosting block parties, and working cooperatively with city agencies to develop neighborhood visions and plans.

The City of Portland expanded its neighborhood involvement program throughout the 1970s and 1980s. By 1986, there were 23 Budget Advisory committees, where citizens mucked around in the everyday business of city bureaus. The Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) was given the task of overseeing appointments, coordinating between BACs and their respective bureaus. Also, ONA was given the task of orientation and training. While some degree of orientation and training has always been a part of commissions, boards, and citizen advisory committees, since these citizens often had less professional expertise in bureau issues, the training needs were more intense. ONA produced background packets on City budgeting and held workshops for new members to provide them with background to help make their input more valuable.

The process of involving citizens through the Bureau Advisory Committees was supplemented by the Neighborhood Needs Report system, also created in the 1980s. The system allowed neighborhood associations to prioritize public works projects. The bureaus were expected to respond either with approval of the projects or explanations about why they could not currently be undertaken or might be undertaken in the future.

The BACs were labor intensive and represented the epitome of the City's investment in citizen democracy during this period. Not all bureaus responded warmly to this process, and eventually the BAC process was modified, allowing bureaus to have more control over how citizen advisory processes were established. But, for the 1980s it represented the City's commitment to representative participation by more citizens.

From the 1960s to the 1970s the number of citizen advisory committees and task

forces grew dramatically. While the number of boards and commissions remained more or less constant, the number of citizen advisory committees more than doubled from 27 in 1960 to 56 in 1972 and the number of task forces jumped from 5 to 25. As previously mentioned, citizen advisory groups and task forces are often short lived compared to boards and commissions. Only 8 of the 56 citizen advisory groups, and none of the task forces were around in the 1960s. The growth of these groups represented a change in the interests of citizens, their desire to be involved in public policy issues, and the willingness of the government to offer room at the table for a broader range of citizens. While membership on commissions and boards remained relatively constant, there were almost twice as many appointments to citizen advisory committees and task forces as there were appointments to city commissions and boards (1572 compared to 856). While civic boards and commissions tend to draw upon well established professionals, citizen advisory committees draw from a much wider range.

The City of Portland's investment in civic engagement peaked in the 1980s and then began to decline. During the 1990s there were fewer formally sponsored citizen involvement committees and fewer appointments of "citizens at large" to participate in public policy debate and community public work projects, as illustrated by the chart.

Estimated number of citizens on City of Portland Citizen Advisory boards per 1,000 population

Decade	Portland Population	Civic members per 1,000
1960-1969	373,000	3.1
1970-1979	380,000	4.7

1980-1989	366,000	6.6
1990-1999	439,000	4.6

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) phenomena took hold in Portland and most communities around America (*references). Instead of citizens working together from a sense of common collective goals or community vision, the period saw a rise in activists motivated by a sense of entitlement: "I've got mine, now pull up the ladder."

In the1990s, unlike the 1970s, two thirds of the news about neighborhood actions was negative. Headlines referred to neighborhoods as war zones: "Battle of Boise," "Long dispute over fire station resolved," "North Portland opposes Jail," "Two Portland victories for NIMBY movement," etc. The neighborhood system, established to provide the city with intermediary organizations, suddenly was challenged by outside groups. Conservative lobbies such as the Pacific Legal Foundation and Cascade Policy Institute adopted techniques first developed by progressive organizations, but applied them to protecting individual property rights and limiting Oregon's land use laws. Even corporations took on the guise of citizen interest groups, forming their own "grassroots" --or, as pundits referred to them, "Astroturf"--organizations such as the Temperate Forest Foundation.

The changes in quantifiable civic involvement in the creation of public policy can be seen as an anomaly, as a larger withdrawal from broad democratic ideals, or as an indication citizens are once again changing their methods. Today, Portland’s official

civic life – indeed, much of the city's bureaucracy --is dominated by yesterday's street activists. This movement of social activist's move from the role of outside agitators to established civic players was brought home recently when a local weekly newspaper published a series of articles about files kept by members of the Portland Police force to monitor the actions of "subversives," Included in the subversives they watched were the current mayor, Vera Katz, and one of the City's most respected city commissioners, Mike Lindberg.

The outsiders are now the insiders, raising the intriguing question of how today's aging establishment will respond to young activists and newcomers. Are the established civic organizations that displaced the civic order of the 1950s flexible and resilient enough to incorporate challenges by outsider groups, young people, and new immigrants?

New structures may provide ways to deal with these emerging challenges while still retaining the innovative character of the civic reconstruction since the 1960s.

In the early 1990s, the City of Portland invested in a strategic planning process called the Portland Future Focus. A 40-member policy committee was created, in the words of its chairperson, Hardy Myers, "to think about our city as a whole, to think about where we're heading, where we would like to head and steps we can take to get there." This kind of visioning process, also adopted by other cities and counties in the Portland region, is an increasingly popular way to bring together diverse communities of interest to develop consensus about a vision for the community. Whereas in the past this vision setting may have taken place behind closed doors amongst the civic elite, strategic planning processes like the Portland Future Focus are more open and democratic. The

membership of the Future Focus reflected the changing landscape of the civic world. While business and labor interests were represented, it was also populated by citizen interest groups and social service and environmental activists. On the committee were nine business representatives, 14 from government and schools, 1 from labor, and 16 from issue interest groups or neighborhood associations.

Watershed councils are another civic innovation with promise. There are at least 80 in Oregon, all formed in the last ten years. The watershed councils, and less formal "friends of" watershed groups, have provided a new governance structure that has facilitated problem solving among public agencies, private businesses, land owners, and interest groups.

The story of a small urban stream in southeast Portland, beset with innumerable environmental problems that for decades defied technocratic solutions provides a rich illustration of how the transformation of civic infrastructure contributed in critical ways to determining solutions to intractable environmental problems. Johnson Creek encountered many of the customary problems of urban streams: poor water quality, degraded habitat, and the impacts from attempts to control or alter natural flooding. These conditions made the creek a thorn in the public eye for decades. Several government agencies took on the task of solving the issues that plagued Johnson Creek, producing 46 reports and/or plans over a 50-year period. Citizens created a storm of protest at various times, contesting the science, the cost, and government itself. One agency, Metro (Portland's regionally elected government), proposed a solution to the creek's problems, only to find itself under attack. A fledging citizen group created a initiative to have it eliminated.

It wasn't until the 1990s, when government agencies adopted a revised policy of co-producing studies and plans alongside citizens, as well as working hand-in-hand with over 175 nonprofit organizations to physically restore the watershed, that progress was finally achieved. This way of approaching public works efforts in a populist, pluralist world is tedious and time-consuming. The solutions to the creek's problems have turned out to be as much social as they are environmental. Engineers and other technocrats still provide the science and engineering, but implementation is conducted within a new process regime. In many cases, citizen activists have become amateur scientists, building their civic skills of organizing and running public meetings as well as learning about the science of stream restoration. The new civic structures, such as the Johnson Creek Watershed Council, and investments by government agencies in educating the public to be better stewards of the watershed, have altered the relationship between citizens and government. This new civic infrastructure which frames the process of policy deliberation and community service on behalf of the watershed has taken the place of traditional civic organizations and traditional agency management practices. Working on stream restoration projects in the field as well as in innumerable workshops and public forums, citizens acquire the knowledge to be well-informed and involved citizens. People work together on public works projects across interest group boundaries.

In the mid-1990s, the Coalition for a Livable Future formed as an alliance of 60 activist groups, including chapters of national environmental groups, affordable housing advocacy organizations, churches and social justice organizations. The CLF conducts most of its work through seven working groups: affordable housing, economic development and urban revitalization, government investment and finance, transportation reform, urban

design, national resources, and environmental justice, The CLF is a self-correcting, self-learning organization that attempts to affect the regional dialogue about urban growth through a variety of self-teaching and public education activities. It has used a variety of forms of outreach and education to meet its goals, including: sponsoring speakers, hosting workshops, creating urban design charettes, sponsoring field and canoe trips, taking advantage of regional “teachable moments,” slide shows, letters to the editor, white papers, conferences, presentations at conferences, coalition and working group meetings, one-on-one conversations, and testimonies. The CLF provides a vehicle for interest groups to leverage their individual power into a stronger single voice by developing shared policy statements and carrying out civic actions. The CLF allows interest groups to learn about the perspectives of other interest groups. In this way, the CLF provides a way to overcome the democratic deficiencies of single purpose interest groups.

An even more unconventional group is the City Repair Project. Formed in 1996 by a group of citizen activists who wanted to create a more community-oriented and ecologically sustainable society. The group started with an “intersection repair” project in southeast Portland where it invited neighbors to redesign a street intersection as a public square with corner kiosks, tea stations and lending libraries all surrounding a mandala design painted in the intersection itself. City Repair has now created a half dozen such intersection projects as well as an annual week-long celebration called the Village Building Convergence.

In all these examples of recent civic innovations it is important to understand the changing shape of the activism. To remain flexible and robust, a civic infrastructure

needs to accommodate the creative energies of youth, newcomers, and challengers, and leave honorable space for civic elders.

One of the important things that Putnam, and his fellow Harvard Scholar, Theda Skocopol, point out about the character of American civic life today is that civic encounters are increasingly orchestrated by clearly defined rules of engagement, but lacking in underlying social structures that allow people to over-come differences, and create collective visions of community. In the good old civic days, they argue, there were more civic places and civic organizations where people met in non-adversarial settings, bridging class, political and interest barriers.

Portland has built an exceptional civic infrastructure over the last thirty years, but as the city enters the 21st century the next test will be whether the collective vision can hold steady with a more diverse population and the divisive tactics of special-interest-group politics. The divides between inner-city and suburban, urban and rural, and religious and secular were narrower when Portland developed its exceptional civic life during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The continued strength of “the city that works” (Portland’s motto) lies in how adroit the Portland civic establishment is at creating an innovative and inclusive approach to community dialogue. That may be dependent on how sincerely its leaders believe in what organizational theorists call the intelligence of the swarm, or in this case the citizens of the Portland region. Can the City live up to the motto inscribed on the Skidmore water fountain, "good citizens are the riches of a city?"

We believe that the ferment of civic activism of the previous generation has changed both the “vocabulary” and “grammar” of civic life–the goals and values that are commonly accepted and the ways that decisions are made. If this is true, Portland represents a challenge not only to Putnam’s thesis of a decline in civic participation but

also to his worry that such declines erode the shared goals and patterns of trust that are often called “social capital.”

Structural explanations do not seem to explain Portland’s rich civic life. Portland is quite similar to Seattle, Denver, Austin, and Columbus in demographic structure and economic base, but it ends up with a very different style of public life. What does seem to account for Portland’s distinctiveness is learned behaviors. Early successful examples of participatory action encouraged other activists and bred institutions that in turn embedded and reinforced particular styles of action. In effect, Portlanders in the last 35 years have learned the rewards and problems of active citizenship through practice.

Nevertheless, the underlying challenge for progressive Portland is whether the efflorescence of civic activism will be limited to a single generation. In places such as Birmingham and Chicago, the “civic moment” faded after a few decades as problems seemed less urgent. New groups with new issues did not find the progressive consensus open to their concerns, and had little interest in celebrating past accomplishments. In effect, this is a civic version of the Halfway Covenant problem–the challenge of maintaining a mindset across generations.

In specific, will Portland’s habit of planning, or a larger habit of civic activism carry its own momentum? Will newcomers care to learn the Portland style? Can a particular political culture or style be transmitted across generations? Will the institutionalizing of activism perpetuate or dampen the fervor of reform? Is the civic infrastructure created since the 1960s robust enough to accommodate the interests and needs of a changing community? Will what Putnam calls the “Portland anomaly” fade or continue in the 21st century?