

## An Analysis of Zoning's Relationship to Social Capital

### Introduction

Robert Putnam's model of "social capital" has been met with copious amounts of praise and constructive criticism since it was first formulated in 1995. In this article, and in his full-length book of the same name, Putnam lays out his thesis that social capital consists of "connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Furthermore, such norms, if widespread, should create "a society characterized by generalized reciprocity [which] is more efficient than a distrustful society".<sup>1</sup> Much of Putnam's own work and that of other authors focuses on large, macro-level trends, such as the decline in voter turnout, or the economic benefits attained by fostering civic engagement in developing countries, in the case of Francis Fukiyama's research. On the other hand, intellectuals like Jonathan Levine (economics) and F. Kaid Benfield (sociology/government administration) have noted declines in civic engagement in their respected fields, but do not use the theory of social capital to inform their analysis.

Levine, author of Zoned Out,<sup>2</sup> and others of the economics persuasion have done much exploration into the positive and negative effects of laws restricting land use and business practices. This body of literature touches on the negative effects of such rules, namely how their conservative nature leads to a lack of response to changing demographic and economic trends in society. Little quantitative evaluation is given to these social externalities, however, as most attention is given to the purely economic and sometimes political ramifications of land use policy.

Similarly, the work of Benfield, et al and others focuses on social capital and zoning indirectly through their study of unique land-use and community redevelopment projects focused on restoring

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1 Putnam, Robert D.. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster. pp. 19, 21.

2 Levine, Jonathan. (2006). Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use. Washington, DC.

citizen cooperation and environmental sustainability.<sup>3</sup> Again, this avenue of research addresses the issue of social capital as it relates to land use, but tangentially. Knowing the latest and greatest ideas for optimal urban and rural planning is nice, but ignoring the underlying causes and effects of existing policy trends for zoning leads to an incomplete picture of how it specifically effects civic engagement for those who actually have to live in the given area.

A large gap in the literature exists here: How does the zoning policy of a city or county government affect the type and level of civic engagement within the polity of that particular jurisdiction? I seek to fill this gap by tying the existing knowledge of zoning law's implications in economics and sociology to a model of social capital that is backed up by empirical, locale based polling data from the Roper Center's Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. This research paper will attempt to prove that there is indeed a strong connection between complex, restrictive zoning policies and a decline in social capital. Conversely, regions that allow for more creativity and personal choice are more likely to display indicators of higher social capital, such as increased political participation, trust in neighbors, and a sense of community participation. Armed with this new information about how land use policy can effect social capital, local governments and private sector developers will be better equipped to create new towns and cities that encourage, rather than repress social interaction.

## Review of Literature

In his popular 2000 book, Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam dedicates a chapter to this topic, but finds city development and land use policies to be inconclusive in terms of predicting social capital. It is indeed possible that Putnam is correct, and there is no strong correlation between land use policies and the level of civic engagement in a particular area. On the other hand, this topic does not appear to have been fleshed out very well, and many important indicators of changes in social capital may have been overlooked.

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3 Benfield, F. Kaid, et al. (2001). Solving Sprawl: Models of Smart Growth in Communities Across America. New York: Natural Resources Defense Council.

For example, the author would have benefited greatly from localized data, focused on the city and/or county level, rather than simple state and national aggregations. All, or nearly all, land use and traditional zoning ordinances are executed under municipal and county jurisdictions. Ergo, quality data at this granularity is critical if one wants to be able to compare social capital indicators in various cities, controlling for zoning style.

Some reliable data on this level does exist in the form of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, sponsored by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. This study was carried out by “Community Foundation” organizations in about two dozen urban and rural areas across the US. This localized data can be compared with the style of zoning used in these areas to determine what patterns, if any, exist. The gap in Putnam's analysis of development and sprawl is that his analysis is largely qualitative and not quantitative. He does not go very far to separate out cities, for the most part, and focuses on the national level, which does not give enough resolution to determine variance between civic engagement in various areas based on zoning. Since there are few state and federal zoning policies, one cannot determine variation without going down to the local level. The end result is a product that is not grounded in empirical statistical data, and thus does not achieve the level of transparency and believability that other chapters of Bowling Alone display.

Several books, journals, and popular magazine articles have been written about zoning and transit schemes over the last several decades. The volume and complexity of such publications seem to indicate that these issues are of great significance to the academic community, and the general public at large, especially here in the United States. Interestingly, the conversational focus has been not on social capital, but rather on questions of economic efficiency and traditional issues of sociology, such as race, economic class, and the struggle of opposing interest groups to use zoning as a weapon against each other. That said, the academic literature seems to have copious amounts of good data waiting for a new application, ie, the context of civic engagement and community development.

The thesis of my research is that zoning does indeed play a significant role in determining whether a particular urban or suburban area will have a high or low level of social capital. Supplemental literature tends to suggest that this thesis is correct, at least in a variety of contexts. We will begin with Putnam's assertions from Bowling Alone, followed by the works of other authors, who at times both corroborate and contradict his premises and subsequent findings.

In Chapter 12, "Mobility and Sprawl", Putnam notes that fully 20% of Americans move each year, a higher proportion than in other industrialized states. Those who move more than once every five years or so are far less likely to invest time and energy in political groups, churches, or other bonding/bridging social capital (abbreviated as, "SC") building organizations. Similarly, as one would expect, areas with high residential turnover tend to have lower SC.<sup>4</sup> This variable is seemingly significant on the surface, that is, until you consider that American mobility has been relatively constant over the last several decades, and actually began to decline slightly around the time that SC was at its peak, in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Given that most national-scale surveys are statistically accurate to within 2-4 percentage points, this indicator may in fact be a constant in reality that does not aid in explaining trends. Interestingly, residents in urban centers and their surrounding suburbs are about 15-25% less likely to be engaged in the community than those in rural areas, both across race and income lines.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, then, it is not frequent moving between developed areas that disrupts community building behavior, but rather something to do with the state of living within these areas proper.

This theory may be supported by Putnam's research on the history of suburban development. In the post WWII suburban real estate boom of the 1940s and 50s, communities tended to consist of large, generally homogeneous suburbs. For example, racial groups tended to live separately, and white collar and working class neighborhoods tended to arise in concentrated areas. Over the following decades, these large blocks have broken down into smaller, more spread out pockets of homogeneity. Beginning in the

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4 Putnam, Robert D.. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 204.

5 Ibid., p. 205.

6 Ibid, p. 207.

early 1980s, this trend became further enhanced by the surge in the popularity of exclusive, often physically walled off “gated communities”. One might expect this trend to lead to more “bonding” SC amongst homogeneous groups within these communities, if not bridging. However, the data seem to suggest that the reduction in political conflict and shared values/expectations instead lead to less participation in politics and voluntary organizations.<sup>7</sup> Is this the result of something within the communities themselves, or rather the tendency of such communities to be “bedroom communities” for urban centers, in which most residents commute to/from work each day, thus spending little time interacting with others. According to Putnam, every ten minutes spent commuting correlates to an equal % decline in civic participation.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly all of Putnam's sample cities have enacted zoning restrictions to a significant degree, as well as at least some regulations specifically related to business land use and economic activity. In contrast, the city of Houston, Texas has very few business regulations, and no formal zoning laws. The New Urban Paradigm, by Joe R. Feagin studies this rare case, and it serves as an interesting contrast to the status quo which may help to highlight trends that may enhance or hurt SC.

Houston, TX is well over 150 years old, but experienced most of its rapid population growth during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, largely thanks to the domestic oil industry, beginning after WWI. There is a historical resistance to government intervention and “assistance” in economic and personal issues in the area, which has resulted in a trend of low taxes and little business regulation. From the Depression of the 1930s on, however, there has been a slow but real desire to accept state and federal tax dollars, especially since the advent of the post WWII interstate highway program.<sup>9</sup>

Demographically, many areas were built by, or at least are home to residents who are employees of one or another of the large oil companies in the area. Neighborhoods are often segregated by relative income level, though the makeup of urban centers are mixed, unlike other cities.<sup>10</sup> Houston also has a

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7 Ibid., p. 210.

8 Bowling Alone, p. 213.

9 Feagin, Joe R.. (1998). The New Urban Paradigm. Lanham, MD:Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.. pp. 60-64..

10 Ibid., p. 73.

long history of economic success stemming not only from oil, but also from cotton production and its role as a strategic interstate trade nexus.<sup>11</sup> If we assume that less segregation and a booming economy promotes more bonding and bridging SC, this city may have a high level based on these indicators. This case may also be supported from Feagin's argument that pressure for zoning usually comes from interest groups (IGs) who fear changes to their economic, demographic, or geographical status quo. Similarly, business interests favor zoning as well, when it is thought to enhance their own particular interests, and/or hurts their present or future competitors.<sup>12</sup> If this is true, such conflict over land use regulations is surely a sign of a lack of trust amongst residents, which is clearly not a component of a functional society.

On the other hand, this rise in nominal (though perhaps not real) income may be attributed to women entering the workforce, in part out of financial pressures to make ends meet. According to Putnam, “women have traditionally invested more time than men in social connectedness. Though men belong to more organizations, women spend more time in them.”<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to this generally libertarian view that “less (regulation) is more”, earlier research by Paul Porter in 1976 suggests a more state centric approach. Porter's thesis is essentially that urban city centers have become run down, both physically and economically, and must be able to compete with the level of social and economic progress found in the suburbs.<sup>14</sup> To achieve this, the author outlines a four point plan for improvement:

1. Classic “urban renewal”- Dense, poor quality housing and business areas have witnessed population declines over the decades since WWII (1945-1976), but could be greatly improved through a reform of zoning laws to improve development choices in these areas. The result would be something more flexible and receptive to changes in the economic environment.<sup>15</sup>
2. Poor inner city families would benefit by moving out of the dense, economically depressed city

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11 Ibid., p. 92.

12 Ibid., p. 182.

13 Bowling Alone. p. 195.

14 Porter, Paul R.. (1976). The Recovery of American Cities. New York: Two Continents Publishing Group, Ltd. p. 172.

15 Ibid., pp. 172-173.

centers to the more affluent suburbs, which would lead to more quality employment opportunities. This should be subsidized by government, especially at the federal level to promote public works, on-the-job training, and other self-improvement services.<sup>16</sup>

3. The Federal government should reduce funding to “centralizing” projects, (subsidized housing, mass transit, etc? [not clear]) and support more geographical decentralization (point #2 above, for example).
4. Federal and state grants/loans should be contingent on performance. They should have specific, tangible goals to be met, and be time limited to encourage success, and reduce dependency.<sup>17</sup>

Presumably, his logic here would be that this should create standards in which local governments would improve performance out of fear of losing funding and political support.

As the four point plan above demonstrates, Porter was of the opinion that government can, and should, be used as a constructive tool to improve the lives of the poor, especially minority groups. Working on the assumptions that higher incomes and more demographically and economically diverse communities generate more SC, then this approach may create positive results. Many authors agree with that problems exist, but disagree about what causes these issues in the first place, and how they should be solved. One such author is Jonathan Levine, author of Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use.

In this work, Levine lays out two competing theories for the creation of the phenomenon of “urban sprawl” that so many Americans love to hate. The first theory, similar to that of Porter's, is that urban sprawl and increased commuter traffic is caused by either not enough, or the wrong kind of zoning policy. This leads to more crime, less social interaction, more pollution from autos, etc. The second theory, embraced by Levine, argues that these problems are caused by inefficiencies and an inflexible status quo that is in fact a direct result of zoning, not a lack of it.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Ibid., p. 173.

17 Ibid., p. 174.

18 Levine, Jonathan. (2006). Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use. Washington, DC: Resources for the Future. pp. 2-4.

Like Feagin, Levine writes that zoning regulations tend to follow the preferences of the original residents of an area, who typically favor relatively spread out development schemes and abhor diversity. Cities, such as Westminster, Colorado, often create “master plans”, and “mixed-use facility” initiatives that act as corporate welfare for developers, and may or may not meet the needs of potential home-buyers and business customers.<sup>19</sup>

Instead, Levine advocates a reduction in building height limits, and other restrictions to building. This policy has been implemented in cities such as Salonika, Greece, and appears to have led to more mixed use structures, more dense development, and more consumer flexibility. He argues that the result has been reduced commuter time, lower associated travel costs, and increase in the level of social interaction.<sup>20</sup> This, in turn, may lead to better community response to changing market conditions, and thus a trend toward higher incomes and lower living costs. With shorter commuter times, and more choice in deciding where to live, residents may find more time and desire to bond and bridge, when they may not have in the traditional zone-restricted suburban model.

## Methodology

The theoretical basis for this paper is grounded in the belief that elements of trust are a critical factor in determining the state of civil engagement, also known as “social capital”, in a given community, be it a small town or large metropolis with sprawling suburbs. There are many potential indicators of community health, be they economic sustainability, low rates of crime, high rates of participation in social organizations, and many others. Scholars have focused on many of these aspects over the years, especially in the last few decades. However, I feel that these studies investigate the products of an important common phenomenon, rather than the cause. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.” A strong network of trust is critical to a functional and productive society, therefore, any study of social capital and zoning policy

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Levine, Jonathan. (2006). Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use. Washington, DC: Resources for the Future. pp. 172-173.

needs to address this key problem: What are the most important indicators of trust (or lack thereof), and how do variations in zoning policy influence them?

To answer this question, we will need to look at three significant factors. First, do residents feel empowered to affect change in their community? Second, how integrated into and accepted are they by the community? Finally, how much do the residents of an area trust local government and each other, and how likely are they to participate in the political process? We can then take this “composite” understanding of a city's civic engagement level, and compare it to the strictness of zoning in the area. For example, we may find that areas with very strict zoning have low levels of trust, while those with fewer requirements may tend to have higher trust factors. The validity of this premise will be explored later in the paper, but methodology is important to outline before such empirical conclusions are drawn. The levels of civic engagement are gleaned from the Roper Center's Community Benchmark Survey data (see Appendix for details). Zoning practices are taken from Punter's Design Guidelines.<sup>21</sup>

The above three areas of trust will be studied in the context of three major cities, for which much current research exists. These cities are San Diego, CA, San Francisco, CA, and Houston, TX. Substantial work on social development has been done with rural settings, but we will not focus on these areas because it is difficult to obtain data on their zoning policies, if they exist. Most research on zoning focuses on the urban and suburban areas of the United States, and so will this examination of the problem. A comparative study of rural land use would be of great academic interest, but it is beyond the scope of this project.

## The Significance of Trust

Trust is the essential cornerstone of civil society, as alluded to above. Without trust, it rapidly decays into chaos and conflict. Individuals will be paranoid of one another, and will be unwilling and unable to work together toward constructive ends. According to Putnam, “...social capital is the principle of generalized reciprocity- I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and

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<sup>21</sup> Punter, John. (1999) Design Guidelines in American Cities. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press.

perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor”.<sup>22</sup> In other words, civil society is in large part an ever changing, ever expanding network of tacit promises, or at least widely held expectations about people's behavior in the future. This “shadow of the future” is critical to stimulating cooperation and interaction between different groups and individuals because it creates a sense of predictability and a belief that one will get back what he gives. In practice, this means that if I do something positive for you, you will do the same for me later on. Conversely, if I harm you, you or someone else may do something negative to me as well.

## The Community's Perception of Trust

Each city will be presented in two parts. First, we will look at a single city's social capital indicators, followed by information about the level of zoning restrictiveness in that city. These relatively brief case study introductions will transition into some topical comparisons of various indicators, such as volunteering, church attendance, etc. At this point, we will be able to see what trends exist, and whether there seems to be a notable connection between the intensity of zoning a city has and the level of social capital we would expect to see there. Having this information would be useful for city planners who wish to improve community involvement in future public and private development projects.

Three cities were studied, based on their relative zoning intensity. Houston, TX has the least restrictive zoning ordinances. San Diego, CA is moderate in its zoning, and is followed by San Francisco, with the most restrictions. As mentioned above, the 2000 Community Benchmark Survey, from the Roper Center was used to determine the relative levels of social capital in these municipalities. The complete survey is very broad, and covers many issues not particularly relevant to the context of zoning policy. For example, many questions related to race were asked, but only those few indicative of trust in others were used. Similarly, questions about political participation were restricted to the local level whenever possible. This was done to clarify variability between sample cities, and to eliminate possible constants,

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<sup>22</sup> Putnam, Robert D.. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 134.

such as national political issues, that do not tell us anything about respondent's opinions of their own city or county.

The responses of residents in each area were broken down into nine topical categories, including the following:

1. Work & Commuting Time
2. Opinions of Community
3. Religion
4. Political Participation
5. Non Political Participation
6. Volunteering
7. Visiting
8. General Levels of Trust
9. Non Political Club Participation

Overall, there was not a huge variation in these social capital indicators between cities. However, there do appear to be some interesting trends that could reveal important information about how zoning might have an effect on some specific elements of social capital, if not a huge influence on the goings-on of a community as a whole. For example, there is an apparent inverse relationship between the level of political participation (voting, general interest in politics, etc.) and participation in more “grass roots” activities, like attending public hearings, being a member of a PTA/PTO, etc. This is rather unexpected, given that Putnam suggests that those who are involved in one form of civic engagement tend to be more likely to be involved in several others as well.<sup>23</sup> Let me note first that, for clarity, the unusual situation in San Francisco is used in comparison to San Diego and Houston, which are closer to the “national average” , as far as current zoning standards are concerned. Therefore, the Bay Area will set the stage for topical discussion below, and the other two regions will be measured against its standard. My hope is that this will make the analysis more interesting and coherent.

San Francisco's residents are notably less inclined to consider their neighbors trustworthy, and less likely to consider their community to be a great place to live than those in San Diego and Houston.

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<sup>23</sup> Putnam, Robert D.. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 195.

At first, one may assume that this discrepancy can be attributed to less religious involvement, or participation in various communal events like concerts or parades. This does not seem to be the case. Although average San Franciscans are somewhat less involved with religious functions, they are the most likely group to attend cultural events in a given year, and are middle-of-the-road when we look at general participation.

San Francisco is also a strange anomaly in that surveyed residents are fully fifteen times more likely to telecommute than those in other cities. This may be caused in part by longer commuter times due to traffic bottlenecks on the highways and the fact that many middle to upper class work in San Jose and Palo Alto, known more commonly as the “Silicon Valley”. Conversely, Houston and San Diego have lower average commuting times, and only a fraction of one percent of employed residents telecommute, or work from home on any kind of regular basis. This seems plausible, as longer commute times would likely induce more people to avoid driving long distances, if possible.

A very direct result of building and zoning regulations is the low proportion of home owners in the Bay Area (just over one in three of those surveyed). In the other cities, more than half of respondents own their own homes, reflecting the relatively lower median home prices in these areas. The value of property in many cities is highly overvalued, in part from underhanded manipulations of the housing market by local governments for the benefit of special interests. This behavior is known as “rent seeking”, and is considered to be illegal as per the 1905 Supreme Court case, *Lochner v. New York*. Though this legal battle applied specifically to whether or not a government can regulate employee work hours (the answer was “no”), there are enough similarities between it and land use regulations to make a strong point against them.<sup>24</sup> The excuse for rent-seeking regulation in both cases is usually that the current market conditions are “dangerous” and allow “incompetent” practitioners to hurt consumers (usually by providing a cheaper and/or better product than the party interested in having said regulations

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<sup>24</sup> Levine, Jonathan. (2006). Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land-Use. Washington, DC: Resources for the Future. pp. 94-95.

created). While this age-old tactic does not ban or explicitly limit the success of competition, it does go a long way towards gaining an unfair advantage over them.

Given this tendency, we may rightly suspect that perhaps some of the zoning and land-use restrictions in cities are created for just these corrupt reasons. The lower overall trust level in San Francisco may be a response to this. These largely arbitrary and self-centered rules act as a tacit endorsement of dishonest behavior, and give the signal that such behavior is acceptable. If social capital is, in large part, a system of reciprocity and trust, and good acts create a positive feedback loop, then it makes sense that actions that have negative social consequences would create a downward spiral.

## Zoning Policy in Action

Our study now turns to the general zoning related practices, rules, and regulations in these metropolitan areas. This subjective, though very important analysis will make it possible to compare cities' zoning policies and level of social capital in order to determine if the former has any significant effect on the other. We will begin with the city of San Francisco, not only because of its almost draconian building restrictions, but also because of the unusual trends in civic engagement it displays.

In the early 1970s, the City of San Francisco's City Council and various administrators were faced with something of a crisis. The already numerous zoning restrictions had become complicated, and the state of California in 1972 passed a law requiring that incorporated cities substitute many such narrow statutes into long-term over arching “general plans”.<sup>25</sup> The idea behind this was to simplify the zoning statutes and make them more fair in their creation and execution. Instead, San Francisco simply bundled up and repackaged much of its existing codes, and threw in some of America's strictest height and bulk regulations in the name of “preserving scenic vistas”.<sup>26</sup> Many considered this a blessing, while others, such as Levine, have criticized these often copied ordinances as a corrupt attempt to artificially inflate property values for the benefit of existing property owners and developers. In fact, San Francisco zoning

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25 Punter, John. (1999) Design Guidelines in American Cities. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press. p. 106.

26 Ibid, pp. 107-108.

has become so restrictive that housing prices in the area have skyrocketed much faster than the national average, while the number of homeless in the area grows steadily.

The 1972 General Plan was widely touted by politicians and planning organizations as being the most thorough, most complete, and most “scientifically accurate” of any major US city. Unfortunately, the complexity and rigidity of the plan has backfired over the last three decades, as it has not allowed for economic or demographic change over time. This has led to many problems in local politics. In the late 1980s, the city reduced its zoning related bureaucracy in the wake of tax limitations and budget cuts, but this did little to reduce the high levels of unemployment and homelessness. On the other side, several popular zoning related ballot measures in the 80s and 90s saw various interest groups taking unsuccessful stabs at one another.<sup>27</sup> These initiatives, along with the controversy over zoning's political motives, may have helped to create a situation in which San Franciscans are less likely to trust each other. The relatively high voting rate (77% as per the Community Benchmark Survey) suggests that citizens there do not always vote in order to promote ideals, but often out of a fear of “the other”. This would lead to a voter participating more often to vote against an attack, or to vote in favor of a measure harmful to another group or groups in an electoral “preemptive strike”.

In contrast to San Francisco, and other cities of Northern California, San Diego took a much less comprehensive approach to the 1972 state mandates, and reserves the most strict zoning policies to safety related situations. San Diego did embark on its fair share of social engineering, but conducted it in a less forceful, and sometimes more deceptive way. As per the 1979 General Plan, the city embarked on a “benevolent mafia” campaign of offering economic incentives, such as taxation and procedural mandate waivers for desired projects, while increasing the burden for those constructing developments deemed undesirable.<sup>28</sup> In 1984, a city sponsored study indicated that expansion had slowed, while the development of existing zones had increased in density. Such numbers should be taken with a grain of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Punter, John. (1999) Design Guidelines in American Cities. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press. p. 163.

salt, given their interest conflicted source, but germane literature seems to confirm that this “guiding rather than micro managing” approach has led to the desired results in this and other cities. Like in San Francisco, however, San Diegans soon became embroiled in controversy over height/bulk limits, as well as mandatory trail and “open space” zones.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, some areas have implemented “mandatory stylistic elements”, which require new residential or commercial structures to be built in a similar style to existing structures in order to “maintain the local atmosphere”. Though not as draconian as its northern neighbor, “America's Finest City” does impose these hotly debated regulations on many projects, most notably those in large scale housing or office developments, or in areas with ocean views. Landscaping guidelines also exist, which add to complexity and controversy. In keeping with San Diego's more conservative and allegedly business friendly atmosphere, such “guidelines” are presented in a less authoritarian manner, and often have “voluntary” provisions. However, those who choose not to follow the recommended guidelines often face political and/or financial consequences, making the word little more than political rhetoric in reality.<sup>30</sup>

One uniquely positive feature of San Diego's General Plan that is catching on in other cities is the birth of the “community plan”, which devolves much of the planning, or lack thereof, to local boards. These boards are advisory, and rule changes must be approved by City Council, but this method has helped the city avoid much of the rigid and outmoded policies that have held back cities like San Francisco and New York. As a result, the area has experienced consistently lower rates of unemployment and homelessness, and fewer rancor causing ballot measures over the years. The increased focus on the neighborhood level may account for some of the higher levels of individual trust and volunteer participation in this city. Those polled had a slightly higher feeling of efficacy, or the ability to make a personal difference, suggesting that many people feel that they can solve problems on a localized, voluntary basis more often than via a centralized, government initiated program. Inherent in this behavior

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29 Ibid. pp. 168-169.

30 Ibid. pp. 178-180.

is at least a minimum level of trust that is enough to get the job done. Therefore, we can expect to see higher levels of cooperation, and thus lower levels of government intervention in a city, as a general rule.

Houston is the municipal case study with the lowest level of zoning. As noted in the literature review, this city has a long history of minimal zoning and business restrictions going back over 150 years. In fact, the area has no significant zoning ordinances on the municipal level. The few restrictions that exist come from the state of Texas and the federal government, and are mostly tied to highway construction funds and interstate commerce related legislation.<sup>31</sup> The Houston area has experienced a huge population boom during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that resulted in a unique, but not totally alien urban layout.

This region of the Lone Star State was relatively small until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when it became a mecca for the developing American oil industry. Due to its largely open building environment, and its domination by large oil and Eastern financial interests, Houston has developed in a somewhat “compartmentalized” manner. By this, I mean that Houston, at least historically, was largely a collection of connected, though very distinct districts.<sup>32</sup> This is in contrast to other cities, such as New York or San Francisco, in which highly integrated communities are little more than aesthetic. Additionally, my analysis of the Community Benchmark indicates this area is predominantly evangelical Protestant with a significant Roman Catholic minority. This is the converse of major cities in California, in which a moderate Catholic majority exists, especially amongst Latinos.

The depressed levels of participation in and sense of trust of formal religious institutions in the two California cities is not extreme, however. On the whole, San Diegans and San Franciscans appear to be only somewhat less likely than Houstonites to find a sense of community in a church, and to trust its members. On the other hand, a higher proportion of them are compelled to participate in church related volunteer activities, and to donate more money to the upkeep and expansion of such programs. Robert Putnam concludes that Catholicism has been on a slow but steady rise since WWII, while Protestant

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31 Feagin, Joe R.. (1998). The New Urban Paradigm. Lanham, MD:Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.. pp. 64;70-72.

32 Ibid., pp. 76-79.

churches have lost between three and four percent of their membership per decade. Catholics tend to become less frequent church members, while Protestants tend to attend more frequently or not at all.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, my research indicates that Evangelicals are less likely to participate in mainstream politics, or support philanthropic causes outside the religious sphere. The bonding nature of the dominant faith and the separation of Houston into broad but distinct cluster communities may be mutually reinforcing. For example, if one lived in an area of town that was predominantly middle class and Evangelical, one would tend to build stronger long-term relationships with those in your neighborhood. At the same time, those who become more involved in such a community are likely to become accustomed to practices that foster bonding over bridging social capital. Overall, the tendency to create same-interest enclaves varies between religious groups, and therefore, does not seem to be an inherent failure of free market land development. This becomes especially clear when one considers the fundamentally divisive and conservative nature of zoning laws themselves.

## Conclusions

What generalizations can we make from all of this? What can be done to address the decline in civic engagement in terms of zoning? In my research, I have come to two significant conclusions. First, that strict zoning and land use ordinances are in fact somewhat detrimental to the level of trust between individuals and various other groups, be they ethnic groups, government, or just “people in general.”<sup>34</sup> Residents in strictly zoned areas, like that of San Francisco, tend to spend more time commuting. Robert Putnam worries greatly about this phenomenon, and argues that “each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by ten percent.”<sup>35</sup> My data did not bear this out. In fact, residents in the commuter-centric San Francisco were actually somewhat more likely to be engaged than those in less congested Houston, especially in terms of political participation. This finding is a bit skewed, however, when we take into account that the average income and median home price is

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33 Putnam, Robert D.. (2000). *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster. pp. 175-176.

34 Based on data from the Roper Community Benchmark Survey.

35 *Bowling Alone*, p. 213.

much higher in the Bay Area than in the South. For this reason, many of the working class who vote less frequently, were forced to leave San Francisco over the last thirty or so years due to rising home prices. In contrast, the benchmark survey in Houston dealt with a city in which the division between rich and poor was substantially less. The city of San Diego, as one might guess, is less congested than the Bay Area, and had a similar level of civic engagement. It also displayed a higher level of trust overall than both of the other cities, indicating that commute times are not as significant as Putnam may believe.

We can therefore say that zoning does detract from civic engagement as far as commuting goes. Zoning does its greatest damage to levels of trust when it inevitably becomes a “political football”, in which two or more factions in the community become antagonistic in an effort to impose their own standards on others out of fear. Both sides feel that their desires are under attack, and therefore “the other” must be overwhelmed before “they” get the upper hand, as we recall from John Punter's study of San Francisco in the 1980s and 90s. This political strife displays the underlying trust deficiencies in heavily zoned communities, and encourages individuals to fight against, rather than work with their neighbors. In contrast, San Diego and Houston have fewer restrictions, and thus far fewer battles of this sort have taken place. Trust levels are also higher. We can see this phenomenon as a feedback loop, in which trust builds more trust, and conversely, trust breaking actions spawn others in response.

This feeds into my second important finding, which is that municipal zoning ordinances do very little, if anything, to effect the underlying levels of trust and other aspects of social capital in a city. Rather, they act as an amplifier of underlying conditions based on volunteering rates, religiosity, political participation, or any number of other factors. Put another way, a constructive reform of such laws cannot actually “improve” social capital, but simply reduces the burden it puts on residents so that they can foster positive relationships themselves. Most reformers, such as Levine and Feagin, say that the best way to reform zoning is to abandon strict standards, and instead shift towards promoting more mixed use projects that incorporate residential and business facilities. Doing so would reduce commuter times, cut

down on environmental degradation/air pollution, and would enable residents to travel less and interact more. The body of research already out in publication focuses nearly exclusively on the economic implications of zoning, ie, that it hurts the local economy, and reductions will enable the city to adapt and change to new market conditions. This is true, but there are also very important social capital implications of reduced zoning restriction, as this paper has demonstrated.

Any city planner, advocacy group, or concerned citizen (to use the original context of the term), must be able to understand the social implications of any city ordinance if he wants to have any hope for reaching a sound decision in city council or the voting booth. He must remember that there is no strong evidence that indicates that such rules help build strong communities, as is often argued by politicians. In fact, there is a strong foundation supporting the opposite argument, which is that zoning rarely has an effect on building civic engagement, and when it does, it is most often hurtful, rather than helpful.

## Appendix

The 2000 Roper Center Community Benchmark Survey data and supplemental information can be found at

[http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data\\_access/data/datasets/social\\_capital\\_community\\_survey.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/data/datasets/social_capital_community_survey.html), as of 12/4/2006. This study was carried out with the help of approximately two dozen “community organizations” on behalf of the Roper Center and Harvard's Saguro Seminar. These organizations randomly sampled 500-1500 respondents via telephone. This study is quite large, and thus contains many questions that are not easily applicable to a study of local zoning regulation and social capital. Therefore, a large number of questions in this survey were left out of my analysis. I chose to include question variables that were either specifically local in scope, or could be expected to change from city to city. Below are the variable numbers and questions. For further details on the response choices, etc., please see the survey's codebook at <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/misc/usmisc2000-soccap/usmisc2000-soccap.PDF>.

## Variables (Categorized)

### **The Community-**

- 5b: Do people in your neighborhood give you a sense of community?
- 5c: Does living in [CITY] give you a sense of community?
- 5d: Does your place of worship give you a sense of community?
- 12: How many years have you lived in your community?
- 13: Do you still expect to live in your community in five years?
- 14: How good is your community as a place to live in?
- 15: Do you own or rent your home?
- 16: Do you feel that you can make an impact in improving your community?

### **Political Participation-**

- 21: What is your interest in politics and national affairs?
- 23: Did you vote in the last (1996) presidential election?
- 26a: Have you signed a petition in the last 12 months?
- 26b: Have you attended a political meeting or rally in the last 12 months?
- 26d: Have you participated in a demonstration, boycott, or march in last 12 months?
- 33m: How often have you participated in a political group in the last 12 months?
- 56l: How often have you attended a public meeting?

### **Volunteering-**

- 26c: Have you worked on a community project in the last 12 months?
- 26e: Have you donated blood in the last 12 months?
- 33f: Do you participate in a neighborhood association, like a block association, a homeowner or tenant association, or a crime watch group?
- 33h: Have you donated time or money to a charity or social welfare organization in the last 12 months?
- 33k: Do you participate in any Service clubs or fraternal organizations such as the Lions or Kiwanis or a local women's club or a college fraternity or sorority?
- 37b: How much money have you donated to non religious charitable organizations in the last 12 months?
- 39: Are there any obstacles that make it difficult for you to be as involved in your community as you would like to be?
- 58: How many times have you volunteered during the last 12 months?

### **Commuting-**

- 41: About how many hours do you work per week?
- 42: Do you ever telecommute?
- 44: On a typical workplace, how long does it take you to get to work?

### **Visiting-**

- 51: About how often do you talk to or visit with your immediate neighbors?
- 52: In the past two years, have you worked with others to get people in your immediate neighborhood to work together to fix or improve something?
- 56a: Have you attended a celebration, parade, or a local sports or art event in your community?
- 56d: How many times in the past 12 months have you visited relatives in person or had them visit you?
- 56i: How many times in the past twelve months have you hung out with friends at a park, shopping mall, or other public place?

### **Non-Religious Clubs-**

- 33b: Do you participate in an adult sports club or league, or an outdoor activity club?
- 33c: Do you participate in a youth organization like youth sports leagues, the scouts, 4-H clubs, and Boys & Girls Clubs.
- 33d: Do you participate in a parents' association, like the PTA or PTO, or other school support or service groups?
- 33f: Do you participate in Clubs or organizations for senior citizens or older people?
- 35: In the past twelve months, have you served as an officer or served on a committee of any local club or organization?

## **Trust of Others-**

- 6: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
- 7a: How well do you trust people in your neighborhood?
- 7b: “ “ the people you work with?
- 7c: “ “ people at your place of worship?
- 7d: “ “ people who work at the stores you shop at?
- 7e: “ “ the local news media?
- 7f: “ “ the police of your local community?
- 11: If public officials asked everyone to conserve water or electricity because of some emergency, how likely is it that people in your community would cooperate?
- 25: How well do you trust your LOCAL government?
- 33a: Besides your local place of worship, have you been involved with any organization affiliated with religion?