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Rethinking the American West: A Civic Intermediary and the Movement for "Quality Growth" in Utah

> Beholding such an extensive scenery open before us, we could not refrain from a shout of joy . . . the moment this grand and lovely scenery was within our view.
>
> —Mormon pioneer, entering the Salt Lake Valley, 1847 (May 1987)

Visions of the American West, both within the United States and around the world, invariably emphasize freedom, wide open spaces, and self-reliance. Yet the West is a paradox of competing themes: strong Native American and European settler traditions of communal life alongside rugged individualism, private initiative against a backdrop of large-scale public planning, and what the renowned Western writer Wallace Stegner once eloquently described as the need for "a society to match its scenery."[1]

Extensive government involvement in land management has been important in the region, from the sometimes violent acquisition of Native American land and the major federal land grants of the nineteenth century to federal ownership and management of protected wilderness and mineral reserves through the present day. More than 90 percent of all federal land in the United States is in the eleven westernmost states and Alaska, and the federal government owns about one-third of the West, including about 60 percent of the state of Utah. Native American tribal lands make up another one-fifth (Kemmis 2001; McKinney and Harmon 2004). In part because of the ongoing federal role and the patchwork of decision-making agencies that hold sway, the local politics of the West tend to frame government initiative, most of all if it affects the exercise of private property rights, as unwelcome interference. Local resistance to state-level land-use initiatives is a case in point. With a deep-seated tradition of localism and a strong property rights movement, the most conventional approach to managing growth—build a coalition

for state-level reform, and shape local decision making through the state government—has gone nowhere in Utah and other states in the Mountain West.[2] Even the word *management*, it turns out, when linked to *growth*, has been a cultural turn-off for many, based on public-opinion surveys.

Utah's politics have been shaped significantly by the Mormon faith and its settler tradition, which centered on creating "an earthly Kingdom of God" in the Salt Lake basin (Larson 1989). In recent decades, the state's politics have been very localized and small-government conservative as well, particularly outside relatively "liberal" Salt Lake City.[3] In the mid-1990s, then, when rapid metropolitan growth helped turn the *conditions* associated with sprawl into *problems* that key civic actors wanted—somehow—to tackle, the conventional approach, understood as policy reform from above, was simply not in the cards.

Instead, a self-described "public-private partnership" followed another course. The key elements with relevance for civic capacity were: distancing planning from government and effectively framing the growth issue alongside the creation of a credible "civic intermediary" institution (Envision Utah), creatively framing alternatives for growth and carefully testing public support for these alternatives before addressing public policy, moving from vision to implementation strategy in ways that emphasized "choice" over "control" and that directly encouraged private-sector initiative as a validator and driver of change, and continuously adapting the functions of the intermediary to compensate for government's lack of planning and implementation capacity—rather than assuming an advocacy posture vis-à-vis particular government positions on policy. Using this sequence, a Utah coalition with important connections to established institutions, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (hereafter, Mormon Church) and the governor's office, drew on preexisting civic capacity, extended that capacity, and put it to bold and effective use to tackle the strains of rapid urban growth. The coalition developed a broadly supported agenda and mobilized disparate community resources to advance that agenda significantly in a short time.

Responding to a Fuzzy Problem: Distancing and Framing

Coming out of the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Utah's real estate market began an unprecedented boom, much of which took the form of suburban sprawl: large-scale new construction of single-

family homes on large lots, as well as new shopping malls and other commercial development, at the metropolitan edge. Most of this new development took place in the ten-county corridor known as the Wasatch Front—literally, the Salt Lake City–facing "front" of the Wasatch range of the Rocky Mountains (figure 4.1)—where 80 percent of the state's population, and much of its population growth, is concentrated within "natural growth boundaries" of mountains and salt flats (figure 4.2). Political insiders recall news coverage and public discussion of how rapid growth threatened the region's prized quality of life as well as a concern to protect the renowned open-space assets that make Utah a favorite destination for outdoor sports—year-round tourism that is crucial to the regional economy. "The timing was magical," says a former state official of the political window of opportunity: "The economy and growth really peaked in 1994. Our economy was growing at twice the national average. A few years later [in a subsequent recession], the rug would have been pulled out from under us."
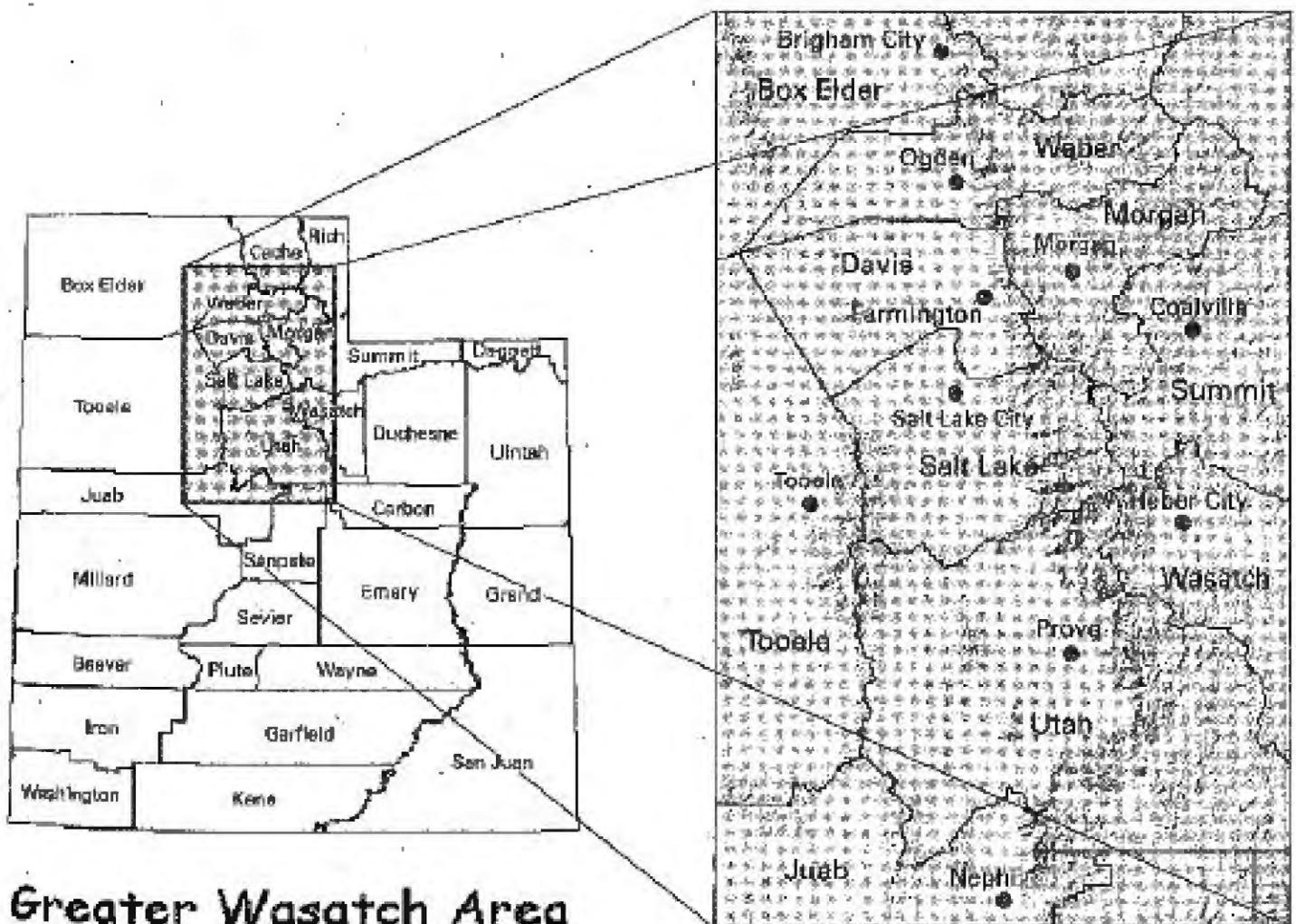

Greater Wasatch Area

Figure 4.1
Salt Lake Region, Utah, showing the Greater Wasatch Front (the Envision Utah focus area for regional visioning, 1997–1999). *Source:* Envision Utah
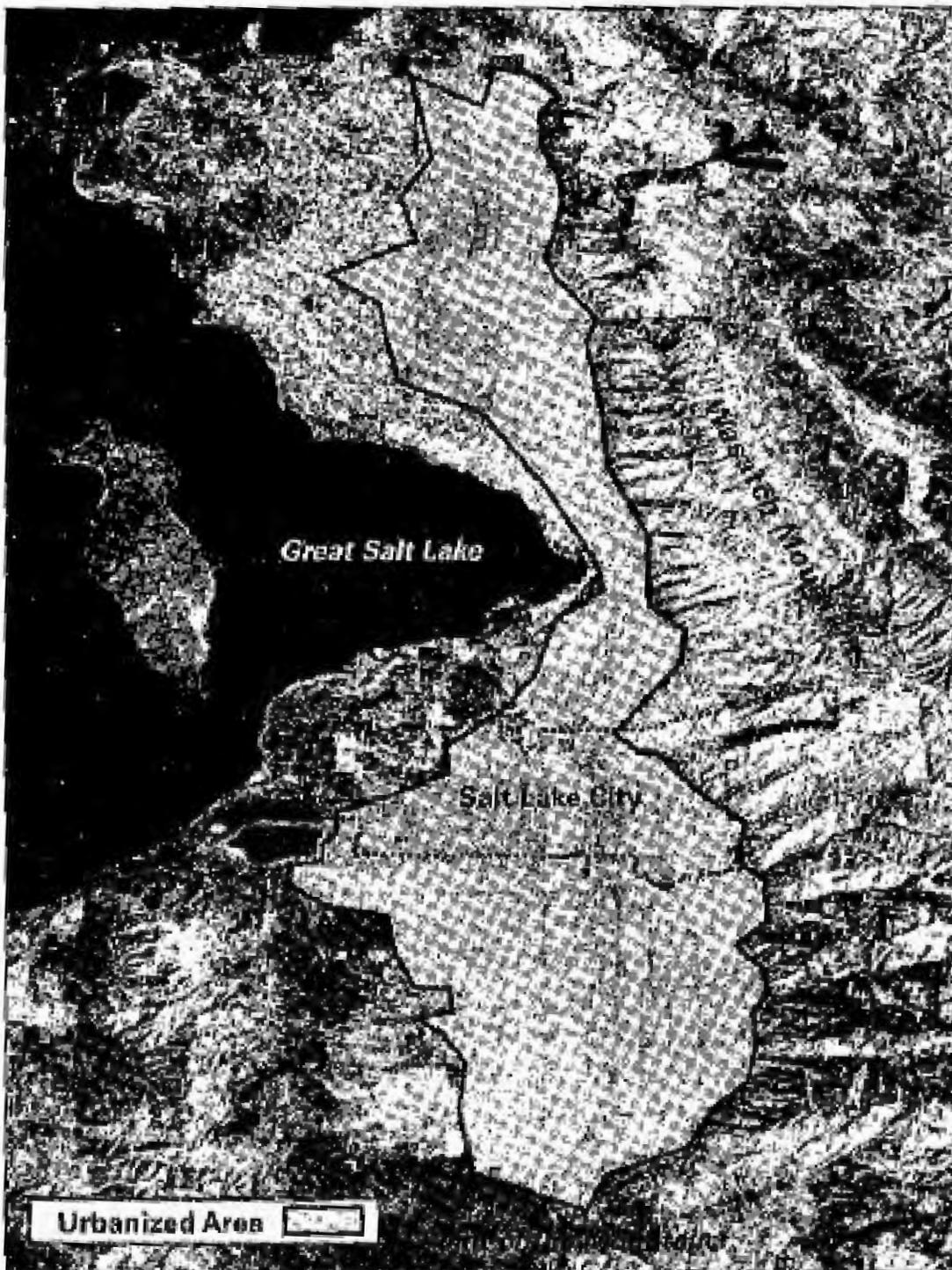
Figure 4.2
Urbanized area, Salt Lake Valley, 2000, showing "natural growth boundaries"
(computer-enhanced satellite image). *Source:* ESRI, Landsat ETM.

But earlier efforts to manage growth had been soundly defeated, and
leading environmental advocates in the region—traditionally, the sharp-
est critics of sprawl and its social costs—were widely perceived as extrem-
ist, out of touch with local values, and indifferent to local needs. So who
could address the strains of growth and how? In 1988, business leaders,
working with elected officials and nonprofit advocacy groups, had estab-
lished the Coalition for Utah's Future. It was to be a mechanism for
dialogue on contentious policy issues, ironically with a major focus on
how to stimulate *more* growth (at a time of recession) but also with a
mandate to build consensus on environmental protection, child care, and
other issues of long-run importance to the state. Longtime insiders and

newcomers to Utah politics alike underline the importance of such quasi-independent consensus-building institutions in a state where the legislature is heavily influenced by conservative rural interests and by those in urbanizing areas who have a rural mindset that resists change. But as I will show, the character of consensus and the makeup of the institutions involved have been the subject of some debate.

By 1995, a Coalition-sponsored survey identified the strains of growth as the number one public concern. When members of the Coalition approached Governor Michael Leavitt about establishing a statewide growth commission, he declined, citing resistance to state-land-use planning and facing a backlash from the right in his party but encouraging the Coalition to organize a broader effort, supported but not led by government, to build consensus. The Coalition quickly established a steering committee, made up of state and local officials, the state's largest housing developer, other business leaders, and "planning advocates," to address the issue of "quality growth" and recommend an approach for the state. At the Coalition's urging, the governor organized a public "growth summit" in November 1995. But the gathering focused narrowly on road building, showing just how much official perspectives lagged behind the reality on the ground.

"There was a real backlash [to rapid growth] emerging, people started to panic," says a prominent real estate developer who participated, "but the localities' first instinct was 'you need large lots to preserve the rural, exurban nature.' Many municipalities were headed toward larger and larger lot sizes and big shopping centers"—that is, toward a pattern that would have accelerated sprawl.

The quality growth steering committee presented initial findings on growth trends and risks to state legislators. The Coalition also worked with state-government staff to project growth trends in demographics, land use, transportation, and air quality in greater detail and organized a major effort to interview key stakeholders—about 150, from business, elected office, environmental advocacy, and other sectors—with questions about whether a process to "coordinate future growth" would be helpful, whether the interviewee would support such a process, and who should be involved. As one insider recalls, "Our study showed that there was a gap where the region's long-term future was concerned: The multi-issue groups were too local, the regional entities were too one-issue in focus." This wide canvassing returned political advice and support to move ahead.

Members of the steering committee also carried out a political "autopsy" of the one major effort to redirect growth in Utah—the effort

to create state land-use planning guidelines, spearheaded by Democratic Governor Calvin Rampton in 1973. Though it cleared the legislature, Rampton's initiative was quickly overturned by the voters through public referendum. Rampton advised the steering committee on quality growth to engage those who led much of the opposition in the 1970s: real estate developers. "It probably took a couple of weeks for the real estate community . . . to kill that," confirms a developer with long involvement in Utah politics. Rampton had failed to engage the real estate industry in the policy making process and felt that had doomed his effort to address growth patterns and strengthen mechanisms for land-use governance in particular.

These steps led to critical early decisions about how to develop a consensus-building effort on growth: distance the effort from government but draw on the analytic expertise of government staff and the constituent knowledge of public officials; involve the likely opponents directly and proactively; emphasize a neutral stance on growth alternatives, at least until a broad process of community engagement had run its course; and frame assumptions about growth—including what "good growth" might include—as carefully as possible to keep diverse perspectives "at the table." On the last point, these early steps underscored the power of language, and savvy framing and public education would remain a hallmark of the Coalition's efforts from this point forward.

Whereas a variety of terms have been used nationwide to describe alternatives to sprawl—including "sustainable" and "smart" and even "sensible" growth—a senior state official observes, "Smart growth has some real strength in the Democratic party . . . for example with Glendening [a smart growth champion, the former governor of Maryland] . . . but a real stigma to it here. We have always used 'quality growth' very intentionally. We used to say that ours was 'homebrew.' " Over time, the Coalition's effort would give content to that label, emphasizing the power of local governments to plan with regional implications in mind and also the importance of market mechanisms to expand choices.

The public face of Utah's response to rapid growth was not simply a matter of message, though, but of messenger. As the steering committee recommended an extended process of public engagement and the formulation of credible alternative scenarios for future growth in the state, the Coalition's initiative—initially called the Quality Growth Public-Private Partnership but soon renamed, more simply, Envision Utah—focused carefully on the role of its lead representative, the chair. The Coalition's

members focused on the credibility of the chair with the well-organized groups, such as real estate developers and local elected officials, most likely to oppose a critical discussion of the status quo model of urban growth. Defusing this opposition to open discussion early on seemed critical to sustaining any longer-run consensus-building effort.

The Coalition selected Robert Grow, president and chief operating officer of a major steel company, former chairman of the American Iron and Steel Institute, and a land-use attorney and trained engineer as well, to be Envision Utah's first chair. A successful businessman with a solid understanding of land development, he was also active in the Mormon Church—the state's largest faith institution by far and a major civic player and landowner in its own right—as well as on state advisory boards. Grow had chaired the Coalition's study committee.

In a state where so much politics is steadfastly local, Grow brought a rare statewide stature, as well as working relationships within the state's relatively small network of opinion leaders and civic insiders—mostly white, male, and Mormon. And as the early champions and critics of Envision Utah agree, Grow more specifically brought a keen understanding of how *not* to address the contentious issue of growth: certainly not by creating an elite group of "experts" to meet in closed-door sessions, render a detailed blueprint for growth, and then pitch the blueprint to the public or their elected officials. "I had been a land use lawyer," recalls Grow, "and so I went to national conferences on the planning tools available. It didn't seem that much was working. Environmental advocates were worried about trusting the public to choose well."

"Grow must have spent a year doing background work before he ever held a meeting of the partnership," says a state official who was closely involved. "The cross-section he got . . . of various stakeholders—civic, religious, business. The tent was so big that, in the end, when things got controversial, it was too hard to walk." Insiders confirm that Grow's behind-the-scenes recruiting of key stakeholders, including homebuilders and other potential opponents with significant political influence, was crucial before Envision Utah formally launched a long-range planning process. A prominent real estate developer explains the significance of this ground-laying work:

We [developers] had spent a lot of time fighting initiatives that we saw as unfriendly to the real estate industry and specifically affordable housing. . . . In my role with the homebuilders association through the 1990s, my job was to sniff out initiatives and kill them as quickly as I could, to keep [policy makers] from doing things that would further restrain homebuilding, impose taxes,

costs. . . . Had we not been at the table early on, with an opportunity to make our feelings known and understood and found some willingness, on the part of really smart people, to listen to what he had to say . . . we would probably have been in that position again. . . . I don't know if Envision Utah would have ever found its legs. The real estate industry would have gone about the same thing [it did] in '73.

Though many in local government would need to be persuaded, a third of Envision Utah's announced "partners" were local elected officials from the region's Council of Governments. They were the authorities who would make most decisions over local land use; they also governed the metropolitan planning organization, which planned and allocated millions of federal transportation dollars each year for roads or transit.

The Mormon Church—known locally by its abbreviation, "LDS" (Latter-Day Saints)—also lent quiet but significant support.[4] In countless face-to-face meetings, Grow and others assured civic and religious leaders that having a "conversation" about the region's future was in the best of Utah traditions—an expression of congregational life in the form of reflection and action—and not a disguised effort to foist particular policy ideas on local communities.

Supporting Grow was a small core staff team that included former state legislator and environmental advocate Stephen Holbrook. Holbrook would be executive director from the launch of Envision Utah in 1997 until 2004, and a broad array of observers affirm that Holbrook's political judgment and nationwide contacts complemented Grow's contributions and those of chairs to follow. Honorary cochairs Governor Leavitt and Larry Miller, owner of the region's professional basketball team, provided additional public- and private-sector standing to Envision Utah at the outset, and state-government involvement included a major commitment of staff resources for demographic and economic analysis. Leavitt would later become one of the longest-serving U.S. governors of his era, bringing what one official called "a passion for the productive middle, acting as a moderate, bringing the right and left together."

Envision Utah's official kickoff, at a press conference and meeting of invited "partners" on January 14, 1997, reflected a savvy about local symbols that would become one of the initiative's trademarks. An actor, dressed as Brigham Young, the founder of Mormon Utah and the area's first territorial governor, addressed the gathering and, through the press, the public at large. "Young" reminded the audience of his strong support for community planning—support that organized the Mormon pioneers into well-defined settlements and produced the town plan and street grid

that defines Salt Lake City to this day. This was the beginning of a long, and by many measures successful, campaign to reconnect planning—in the sense that Howell Baum (1997) has defined it, "the organization of hope"—to strong local traditions and values. Peter Calthorpe and John Fregonese, well-known architects and planners linked to a movement of designers known as New Urbanism, also addressed the kick-off gathering, outlining a nationwide interest in finding alternatives to sprawling urban growth. Participants were asked to sign a pledge card affirming that they would put self-interest aside and explore long-range solutions for Utah that reflected the common good—another symbolic act, to be sure, but one that signaled a determination by Envision Utah's lead organizers to quickly place their long-range planning process above the polarizing debates that specific development projects or policies often trigger.

Envision Utah decided to target the ten-county Wasatch Front, where projections placed most future growth in the state (figure 4.1); years later, it would expand to cover the entire state. The Front was vast (23,000 square miles or about the size of Ireland) and also a vast landscape of jurisdictions: 90 cities and towns, over a thousand elected and appointed officials shaping growth policy in those places, and 157 special-purpose agencies to manage water and other resources, transportation investments, and other needs as well. The initiative began official fundraising, gathering support from local governments, leveraging the state's in-kind contribution of analysis, and winning crucial major grants from local and national foundations, to cover staff support, research, and pubic education expenses.[5] The initiative also organized its core participants into steering, public awareness, and technical committees and commissioned a major "values survey" of the region's residents—a survey that would inform Envision Utah's approach to engagement, its public awareness campaigns, and later its focus on the provision of "tools" to support local-government pursuit of unfamiliar approaches to land use.

Observers of politics have long underscored the power of values, and of efforts to represent and "claim" public values, to shape voting, public comment on policy decisions, protest action, and other forms of political behavior. Over the past decade, the theory and practice of negotiation and dispute resolution have highlighted, more specifically, the importance of distinguishing values from interests (Forester 1999). While the latter represent our specific understandings of *what we want*, or think we want, in a given situation where a decision looms, and while interests may be shaped over time through framing and deliberation, values are

deeper, more abstract principles that help define *who we are*. Because we experience values as part of our identities, perceived attacks on values, or perceived indifference to them, can all too easily be seen as attacks on, or denial of, our selves, our very worldview and sense of what is valuable or right.[6]

Envision Utah selected Wirthlin Worldwide, a firm with a track record of political research for major political figures in Europe and America, to conduct the values survey. "Their approach is 'persuade with reason, motivate with emotion,'" recalls Robert Grow. Envision Utah determined to make a campaign of public awareness building and engagement center on Utahns' most important shared values, which the survey identified, in a sophisticated hierarchy of concerns, as personal security, accomplishment, self-esteem, and freedom (figure 4.3). Not only would Envision Utah use this to build and sustain a constituency for planning on contentious issues, but this values framework would help tame the complexity of the issues by connecting planning discussions to concrete things that the region's inhabitants valued: time with family, community responsibility, personal safety, and so on.
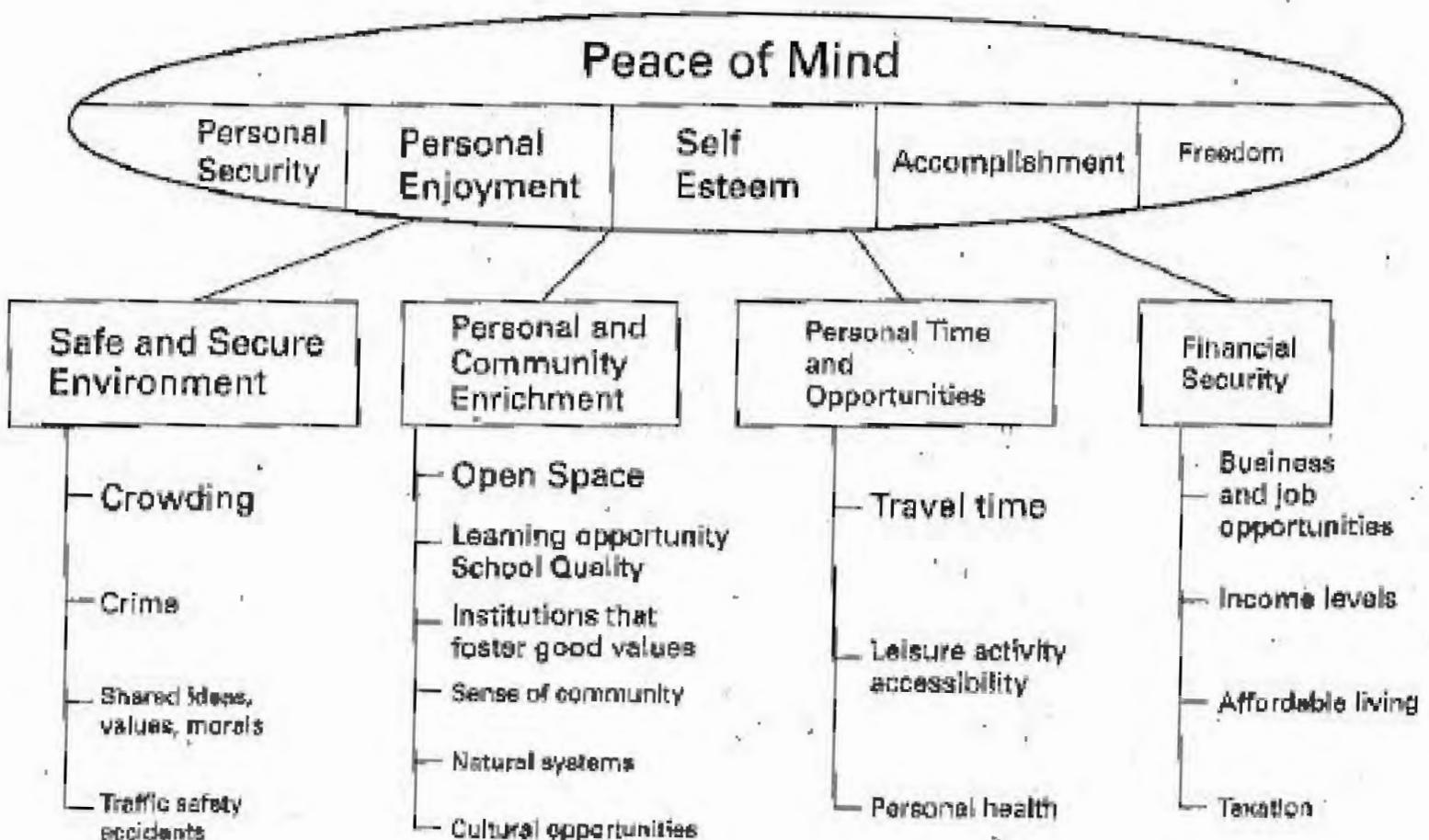

Figure 4.3
Envision Utah Values Survey diagram. The survey generated a hierarchy of public concerns that became the initiative's touchstone for public engagement and awareness campaigns. *Source:* Envision Utah, data by Wirthlin Worldwide, May 1997

Organizers quickly highlighted and repeated, at every opportunity, another special feature of the regional context: Utah has the nation's highest birth rate, and two-thirds of the Wasatch region's projected growth was natural increase.[7] Utahns would be planning first and foremost for their children's and grandchildren's future, not that of newcomer migrants to the area.

While raising funds and gathering these data to guide the process, Envision Utah began to actively pursue opportunities to put quality growth and the aims of the community engagement process in the news. The initiative's leadership was extraordinarily sensitive to the need to distinguish the process from "government planning" and "growth management," and yet the initial news coverage, which intensified later in 1997 when Envision Utah organized community workshops to engage the public in assessing growth alternatives, reflected uncertainties about the initiative's identity and its real aims. In a single month, for example— May 1998—the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the area's largest daily, described Envision Utah as a "long-term planning advocacy group"[8] on the one hand, emphasizing support of a process and of the need to plan, and as a "statewide growth management think tank,"[9] emphasizing expertise in, and perhaps suggesting a position on, the issue of growth "management," with its largely regulatory and negative connotation.

But as this first phase segued to the public process that would make Envision Utah much more visible and controversial, the initiative had accomplished several things: established itself as an intermediary (a convener and framer of important public issues), distanced the aim of planning from government authority yet ensured vital technical expertise and the active engagement of elected officials as experts on constituent concerns, and engaged the most likely private-sector opponents—the developers and homebuilders who, a quarter-century earlier, had snuffed out Utah's only other attempt to find an alternative to sprawling growth.

Framing Alternatives and Testing Support

Supported by professional architects and urban planners, the first round of Envision Utah workshops, launched and widely advertised in May 1998, used classic techniques in participatory design: employing visuals, including photographs, to gauge community preferences (Sanoff 1999). The strategy is to focus on end outcomes that people value, not particular development projects or technical planning concepts. The *Tribune* reported:

Figure 4.4
Political cartoon. Early criticism of Envision Utah focused on the legitimacy of its approach. Reprinted with permission from the *Utah Standard-Examiner*

Envision Utah's first week of community workshops started with a question: How should a Wasatch Front and Back with 5 million people look and feel in 2050? It ended with a more basic question: How to get the 1.6 million people already here to agree? . . . If one truth emerged from the first round of community meetings, it is that even if most people agree suburban sprawl must be slowed, some folks still like living in suburbs with big yards and big garages.[19]

Public criticism began that Envision Utah was not a neutral convener at all—that the organization preferred a compact and walkable form of development and had begun, after two rounds of workshops in 1998, to inappropriately attribute this preference to a divided public (figure 4.4). The media highlighted a gap that would persist for years to come: between support that residents might express in principle, at long-range planning meetings, and what they would support in the near term in the way of development specifics, especially in small towns on the metropolitan fringe. For example, when residents in the semirural town of Farmington rejected compact development as the Envision Utah workshops continued around the region, the *Tribune* reported that

the theory that Utahns are willing to live closer together to preserve vast open spaces from development is taking a beating in west Farmington. Neighbors who loathed a [developer's] plan to build more than 500 tightly clustered homes in a pasture . . . have persuaded the developer to spread the homes over more of the property and increase the lot sizes. It is a triumph of horseback suburbs over "walkable communities," which Wasatch Front residents are telling planners

they want. "Who says we need to cram everybody into one place?" asked Tonna Bounds ... who led the push for larger lots. "People come here because they want a piece of U.S.A., and that does not consist of a 5-foot backyard."[11]

And the *Tribune* editorial commented,

Clearly, the jury remains very much out when it comes to views about how best to accommodate growth. Planners, urban engineers and citizens favoring alternative scenarios should continue to disseminate their ideas to as wide a public as possible, but at the same time, avoid making assumptions about what citizens prefer.[12]

Echoing what local elected officials would tell me in interviews some six years after the Envision Utah visioning process, Flint (2006, 191) writes about this opposition to more compact living that "density is all that is cramped and unhealthy and somehow un-American about urbanism. Being free from density is associated with moving up in the world. ... Density even sounds like a bad word, to be said with distaste, like 'pollution' or 'congestion.'"

Robert Grow and the core supporters and representatives of Envision Utah continued to face suspicion from elected officials as well. Many remained wary, and some were vocal about it. Jerry Stevenson, mayor of Layton City and later a strong supporter and chair of the effort, was one early critic. "Maybe with Envision Utah, I haven't quite caught the 'envision' yet," he would tell the press in September. "I'm a firm believer in economics, and a lot of what's happening [in the region] is economics-driven."[13]

"The market determines how many homes get built," concedes Dan Lofgren, a real estate developer who has long been active in Envision Utah and served as its vice chair, "but the public gets to determine where they get built. The market wanted variety—starter homes, townhomes, affordability—but local land use policy wasn't letting it happen. So this [planning process] was a major opportunity for us to educate builders, elected officials, others." Lofgren also stresses the importance of a long time horizon: "The magic of getting me [a real estate developer] to sit down next to a conservationist and ... find common ground because my livelihood and his position on a development project aren't at stake and we can talk about a future we both want—for these mountains to be available to everyone, for our kids to own homes and be able to find jobs in this community."[14]

Beyond the long time horizon, Grow, Holbrook, and the other organizers insisted on giving participants in the planning process concrete tasks: responding to images, using paper chips (like pieces on a game board)

to determine development types, on a map, that would accommodate another million people in twenty years. "You have to give people something tangible to do," comments Holbrook, "not set up an abstract conversation. We tried to move from philosophizing to problem-solving." At the center of the process were the "table talks," wherein about ten stakeholders worked to generate consensus on how to accomplish these specific tasks. "A churchleader might be sitting next to a mayor, real estate developer, and environmentalist," notes Holbrook. The table talks reflect what researchers Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) have described as part of a larger shift, worldwide, from *information exchange* models of citizen engagement to *processing* models, wherein citizens deal directly with the tough trade-offs faced by policy makers. Based on a two-stage engagement process—the first stage focused on *where* to grow in the region (in built-up areas versus undeveloped lands), the second on *how* (form)—Envision Utah began to report strong community support for "infill" development over new growth on undeveloped lands, walkable neighborhoods over heavy reliance on automobiles, and strong protection of "critical lands."

Based on public input and a baseline growth scenario generated by state government staff, Envision Utah staff and its consultants also worked hard, in 1997 and 1998, to develop alternative long-range scenarios for the region. having studied scenario development in long-range visioning done by other city-regions, including Denver, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and Portland.[15] Like the citizen table talks, the scenario developers had a clear task: to show distinct ways that one million more people could be accommodated in the region by the year 2020. But unlike the intimate face-to-face gatherings, the scenarios had to earn standing as legitimate knowledge in the eyes of the public—a factor consensus-building experts have outlined as fundamental to policy making (Andrews 2002; Ehrman and Stinson 1999).

Envision Utah publicly released four long-run development scenarios, emphasizing the neutral and deliberative process followed by state planning staff to make crucial assumptions about the future, on November 14, 1998. The four included the status quo, highly dispersed growth pattern projected forward (Scenario A), slightly less dispersed development that would obtain if all existing local plans were followed (B), a compact alternative with significant transit expansion and more walkable neighborhoods (C), and a still more compact fourth scenario (D).

The state's projections showed that beyond significantly reducing new land consumption, C could save taxpayers and developers over $15

billion in infrastructure costs. The stage was set, and a major campaign of public education and unofficial voting, to test support for each scenario, began. The process had evolved beyond gathering preferences, informing people's intuitions about where unplanned growth would lead the region, and "crunching" numbers—into a discussion about choosing a specific vision of the future and figuring out how to realize it. Grow and others continued to avoid mention of near-term implementation choices, as skeptics—and some supporters—pushed for specifics on where the planning exercise would lead. He told the *Tribune*, "Once you say how you're going to implement this, you blow away two-thirds of the people who aren't involved." But a real estate developer argued, echoing other critics, "Envision Utah needs to be charged with coming up with specific legislation to implement their findings."[16]

The contention persisted, as the substance of the scenarios and the context for their use was debated. In January 1999, the *Tribune* observed that Envision Utah was "wading through public confusion and political name-calling in its quest for policies to curb urban sprawl" and that it "struggled to remind residents that if they want big yards and extra cars, the group would not stand in their way."[17] Community workshops, said the newspaper, gave residents a chance to vote on "hypothetical futures" but also "brought out the skeptics who fear the whole exercise is a government plot to end the suburban good life." At the national level, Vice President Al Gore, a well-known environmentalist and a Democrat preparing to run for president in 2000, had proposed a $10 billion "smart growth" initiative that drew attention in the region, in large part because of Envision Utah.[18]

Some 17,500 of the 580,000 newspaper inserts mailed by Envision Utah and also made available online—each providing a readable description of the four scenarios and a mailer to return the reader's unofficial "vote"—were completed.[19] The governor had called this voting a "citizen obligation," and local media editorialized on behalf of the survey as well. Some critics contended that the scenarios were oversimplified and also constructed to most favorably portray the compact alternatives. Meanwhile, efforts to demonize the "quality growth" concept, as well as the Envision Utah process, failed to gain momentum—even when a fierce national debate made "smart growth" and Gore's proposals a target for attack. "We had our run of the anti–smart growth people," recalls a state official, "and they flew in national speakers and so on. But Grow and the others had built too broad a base."

In March, Envision Utah released its survey results, announcing that Scenario C—a moderately compact alternative to sprawl—was the public favorite, chosen by about 56 percent of respondents on its own or in combination with D, an even more compact alternative that analysts projected would lower air quality.[20] The initiative acknowledged that the response rate was but 3 percent (not unusual for a mail-in survey) and the respondents a self-selected group who tended to be more affluent and educated than the regional average. But based on a carefully conducted, statistically representative follow-up poll of the region, independent analysis showed that the mail-in's preferred choice was valid and that adjusting for respondents' demographic traits did not change the result.[21] Envision Utah immediately signaled the importance of ongoing public engagement to choose specific growth strategies consistent with the new vision, and press coverage was positive.

From Vision to Strategy and Implementation

Thus far, Envision Utah had recruited skeptics and potential opponents, held off challenges to become an advocacy organization with a specific policy agenda, and completely upended the traditional approach to public planning in the state of Utah—distancing citizen engagement from government authority, challenging participants to make choices that reflected real trade-offs and competing objectives, shifting the focus from near-term development decisions to long-run outcomes and their implications, and emphasizing the relevance of long-range planning—and its literally "big" ideas—to the core values and everyday experiences of local people. As the U.S. Senate's Smart Growth Task Force began hearings in March 1999, Envision Utah became its first case study, and a senior staff member told the press that the initiative's "method of using resident involvement instead of government mandates is the type of solution the 23 senators are looking for."[22]

But what the task force may have missed was the initiative's extraordinary two-level strategy, targeting the grasstops *and* grassroots, so to speak: Envision Utah had not begun with broad public outreach. It had "political legs" because of its savvy recruitment of influentials, including likely opponents. The initiative had secured, acted on, and sustained a mandate to do grassroots community engagement for the purpose of consensus building, in effect to create a public for a bold public idea. Part coalition backing that idea (quality growth) and part civic intermediary enabling an atypical dialogue, Envision Utah had, more tangibly,

developed well-researched scenarios (possible futures) and tested public support for them—a process that no elected body had been willing or able to do in the state's history.

The challenge now was helping the region's many interest groups and centers of influence to actually move in concert with a new vision—to outgrow sprawl. As a representative of the Utah League of Cities and Towns observed in March 1999, "Envision Utah has done a fine job of identifying the costs of sprawl and getting a consensus that people want something different for the region as a whole, but it is more difficult to get people to embrace change in their own neighborhoods."[23] In this final section of the case, I examine Envision Utah's challenges and choices beyond the regional visioning phase, including its reinvention as an intermediary: from consensus builder to capacity builder and public educator.

In April 1999, soon after results of the unofficial scenario "vote" were made public, Robert Grow, the initiative's charismatic and widely respected founding chair, stepped down and was succeeded by Jon Huntsman Jr. A businessman and former diplomat, Huntsman struck a reassuring tone, telling the press that Envision Utah was "an educational tool drawing on the views of thousands rather than a heavy-handed government program. This is one of the greatest exercises in democracy I've ever seen. No one can claim this is centralized planning or Big Brother stepping in."[24] Indeed, quality growth principles, though linked to the Envision Utah "brand" and supported by a broad base of the region's most influential people, had no force of law, for the organization had no formal authority. Voters and their local elected officials would accept or reject the application of new growth ideas to their communities, a feature that significantly strengthens the consensus-building effort's claim to legitimacy and accountability. Though skeptics and critics remained, in July, an independent, good-government policy research group hired by Envision Utah to assess its planning process defended its transparency, the quality of its scenarios, and the initiative's respect for market forces against claims of a regulatory heavy hand or predetermined solutions hidden behind a show of public participation.[25]

Huntsman would later campaign on his service to Envision Utah and win the governorship in 2004. Together with Envision Utah's staff director, Stephen Holbrook, and its steering committee of influential business and civic leaders, Huntsman reinvented the initiative over the next few years, launching a second major phase of community engagement and

creating new relationships with government at both the state and local levels. The result of the first effort was a Quality Growth Strategy focused on six core goals: enhance air quality, increase mobility and transportation choices, preserve critical lands, conserve water resources, provide wider housing opportunities, and make more cost-effective public investments in the infrastructure to support growth.

As for the second effort, where previously the governor's support had primarily been that of the bully pulpit and data analysis, the state became a direct financial supporter of local-government efforts to pursue quality growth and exchange planning lessons. Governor Leavitt and allies in the state legislature had just won passage of the Quality Growth Act of 1999, which called for the creation of a state commission to study growth patterns, identify "quality growth areas," and make recommendations about providing state-level incentives to cities and towns willing to focus development in those areas. Notably, the act, though it specifically emphasized land conservation, "efficient use of land," and "housing availability," also expressly forbade regulatory action by the state.[26] The act offered the carrots without the sticks, and a range of observers credited Envision Utah with making it possible for state government to step forward on the growth issue.[27]

A newly formed state commission included several core participants if the initiative, and the commission would work closely with Envision Utah, in subsequent years, to recognize exemplary local-government efforts and fund local planning. Budget cutbacks during recession would soon eliminate the planning grants, and some observers worried that some of the grants had gone to "pet projects" of particular legislators and not to important planning efforts with broad community support. Yet the Quality Growth Act gave state government a politically safe way to promote quality growth as a viable and increasingly tangible alternative to sprawl.

Between 1999 and 2001, Envision Utah worked to develop a set of planning tools, drawing on national models for transferring land development rights, creating "transit-oriented development," and more. The tools were to suit the region's topography and politics, all within the quality growth framework. Envision Utah unveiled a planning "toolbox" in 2000 and promoted it widely. Still avoiding the role of policy advocate, the initiative targeted two crucial stakeholders—local governments and real estate developers—facilitating demonstration projects, assisting with analysis, leading annual public awareness campaigns focused on one or more of the component principles of quality growth, and running its

trademark community workshops in key cities and towns facing growth pressure—but only when invited to do so by a local mayor.

In June 2001, the *Tribune* reported that the initiative had "completed its transformation from a regional agenda-setting group to a tool for cities and builders,"[28] citing the appointment of Greg Bell, a former mayor, to succeed Huntsman as the initiative's third chair. "Utah posted the nation's fourth-fastest percentage growth in the 1990s," said the newspaper, and "the shift . . . to a mayor and former planning commissioner signals the 5-year-old group's new emphasis on helping cities and developers implement new ideas about smart growth." But the effort had not abandoned public education, recognizing the need for a credibly independent, nonpartisan effort to continue building a constituency to encourage local-government experimentation with new approaches.

Envision Utah also moved quickly to pursue major demonstration projects, from innovative county-level growth plans to major housing or "mixed-use" developments (that combine housing, retail, and community facilities) to create more walkable neighborhoods. The region's historic role as a mining center would offer a new and unforeseen opportunity. An environmentally savvy, London-based multinational company directed its local subsidiary to form a land-development company and explore innovative options for developing the company's vast land holdings in the Salt Lake Valley—at 93,000 acres, an estimated 50 percent of the developable land in the area. Noting the consistency between Envision Utah's quality growth principles and the parent company's approach, Kennecott Land became actively involved in the pursuit of growth alternatives in the region. "In mining, we've learned that how you treat the land and the community gets heard around the world," the company's president, Peter McMahon, told me.

For its flagship real estate project, Daybreak, Kennecott asked New Urbanist designer Peter Calthorpe to return to the Salt Lake Valley. At buildout, Kennecott's holdings will comprise a new, planned city, with perhaps 160,000 homes—"the largest quality growth development in the world," says Robert Grow, or what the *Washington Post* called a "megasuburb, twice the size of San Francisco."[29] But as a long-run regional demonstration, the project faces the challenges associated with winning local clearances and responding to market demand. Observers cite Daybreak as a triumph and opportunity for Envision Utah but also as a window on the dilemmas intrinsic to its current role: When and how should it advocate, beyond educating and facilitating, to make things happen?

A local developer stresses the initiative's informal role as a catalyst of support in lieu of traditional lobbying: "Envision Utah even offered to come out for or against us [informally], whatever would help." He adds, "People-in small towns [here] love coming together to do a vision. But they don't want it built if it seems to threaten the status quo." Old habits die hard, and Envision Utah had its new work—adoption of quality growth at the local level—cut out for it. But the effort had "broadened people's conception of what demand is here," says this developer, high-lighting the need for a wider variety of housing types. He adds that the local real estate developers association had offered to "take the heat" on controversial issues to "help Envision Utah protect its brand." Other "demonstrations" have helped. Quality growth got a boost in 2002, when Salt Lake City hosted the Winter Olympics. The city offered visitors Trax, a newly built light rail system that quickly exceeded projected ridership levels. An effort to place rail funding on the ballot had failed in the early 1990s, yet after Envision Utah's planning process and public education announcements, the measure passed in 2000. Here, in the land of large lots and resistance to traditional planning, localities actually began to clamor for new transit stops, according to transportation planners and media observers.

In May 2003, a Wirthlin survey commissioned by Envision Utah showed that 62 percent of the region's residents remained unfamiliar with the initiative *by name*. However, 68 percent of those who were familiar with it approved of its efforts to "create walkable neighborhoods, expand mass transit choices, and preserve open space," and 72 percent of those who were unfamiliar with the initiative approved of the efforts when told of its goals.[30] Moreover, 76 percent reported a positive view of Trax, and 88 percent favored expanding it. Local media widely credited Envision Utah with the success of a voter-approved quarter-cent sales tax increase to support transit development. A large majority of survey respondents also favored a wider housing mix to accommodate different age groups (75 percent) and income levels (80 percent)—a domain in which Envision Utah had campaigned, as I previewed in the previous chapter, with images and a narrative emphasizing "your own children and grandchildren" and schoolteachers, police officers, and other public servants.

A linked survey of hundreds of local officials indicated that all had heard of Envision Utah, more than 96 percent were aware of its Quality Growth Strategy and planning tools, over 94 percent were in cities or towns that had sent a staff member to Envision Utah trainings, and over

60 percent said their jurisdiction had used the planning tools. Some were the "converts"—early critics of the effort, local elected officials in particular, that I interviewed about how and why quality growth proponents had reassured them (the skeptics) about the movement's goals and the promise of voter education and support. Envision Utah reported that over 2,000 local officials, developers, realtors, and others had attended the initiative's trainings on the use of quality growth planning tools.

Not everyone had come around. One small-town mayor on the exurban fringe of the Salt Lake Valley told me, for example, that he and his voter base still associated Envision Utah with the bane of density—an "urban" lifestyle—and with it a host of urban problems such as crowding and crime that they were determined to avoid. At the time, that town had dug in its heels in the face of new real estate demand, insisting on large, ranchlike lots for all new homes.

Yet as I completed my fieldwork in the region in early 2004, some seven years into the Envision Utah initiative, its staff was actively engaged in planning key growth corridors around the region and partnering with metropolitan transportation planners to better integrate long-range transportation plans and investments with land-use plans for quality growth. "Government fragments these functions," comments Robert Grow, who remains involved, "but we brought these 'silos' together." The initiative's positive reputation now made it a sought-after partner for public agencies with major planning responsibilities tied to regional growth. The Envision Utah leadership was supporting efforts to study growth effects of state and local tax policy—a very politically charged issue throughout America—and considering ways to respond to new top-of-mind public concerns about a weaker job economy and the challenges facing public education.

With its major philanthropic funding exhausted, the initiative was also working to become financially sustainable in its role as capacity builder for local governments without competing with private firms for government contracts. And some observers, particularly minority advocates, were calling for more attention by Envision Utah to the region's growing ethnic diversity—a diversity just starting to appear in the initiative's leadership, which remains centered on the region's top business-people and established civic influentials. A prominent real estate developer offered a broader assessment of the initiative's status vis-à-vis its original, ambitious goals: "We have to resist the temptation to declare victory. We need to institutionalize it somehow. We still have people to persuade."

As this book went to press, there were more and more signs of the quality growth movement's impact. Several large Utah counties have adopted, in their long-range plans, core elements of the quality growth strategies, including major land set-asides for conservation and transfer of development rights authority. And in 2006, the regional council that plans and allocates major investments of federal transportation dollars—now led by strong Envision Utah supporters, both elected and appointed—adopted an aggressive ten-year plan to add three light rail lines, as well as a major commuter rail line, to the popular Trax system.

Summary and Implications

Dilemmas of urban growth spotlight the essence of civic capacity as a resource: the capacity to solve problems together in a shared place. As respected Western environmentalist and former mayor Daniel Kemmis (1990, 7) writes, "The strengthening of political culture, and the reclaiming of a vital and effective sense of what it is to be public, must take place and must be studied in the context of very specific places and of the people who struggle to live well in such places."

In this case, I have focused closely on Envision Utah's origins, choices, and timing—not primarily to provide an account of savvy political management but to offer a view of building and using civic capacity that goes beyond very broad structural accounts, including overviews of the rapidly evolving collaborative forms of resource management that Kemmis (2001) and others have highlighted as hallmarks of a new politics in the American West.[31]

First, the Utah context represents an extreme illustration of how inadequate the popular vote and issue-based lobbying are to leading significant change on a contentious public problem. The coalition's early recruitment of political insiders, not its subsequent efforts to engage the grassroots public and those with private interests in urban growth, represents the first key to developing and acting on a shared agenda of change. This was achieved in spite of deep divides, mutual suspicion between opposing viewpoints, and a political culture unfriendly to regional planning. These features suggest an embedded view of the real promise of consensus-building approaches advocated for managing sprawling growth (e.g., Innes and Gruber 1994; Susskind and Gensberg 2002). Consensus-building approaches demand a wider civic strategy if they are to shift the agenda, constituent support, and results "on the ground"—and not simply resolve disputes over a single development

project or forge a policy framework on a complex, multifaceted issue such as urban growth. As for significant learning, the broad approach to consensus building in Utah has a real claim to "dramatic changes over time in the distribution of beliefs" (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993), both of core coalition members, other influentials, and the initially change-resistant public at large. I return to this in the next chapter's comparative summary.

Second, an early willingness to do broad-based consensus building gave Envision Utah, a fledgling intermediary organization with ties to government but no formal authority, legitimacy as well as influence (reach). It is difficult to imagine that any business, government, or non-profit interest group, leading on its own, could have achieved so much "soft power," and with it political reach, in the Utah context. It was not clear, based on a wide range of interviews with elected officials, public and private planners, journalists, environmental advocates, and others, and on extensive media and report review, that Envision Utah had shrunk from any of the major challenges associated with regional growth and its implications—only that the group carefully managed public perceptions, especially on the most controversial issues such as taxation, and constantly looked for ways to enhance its legitimacy and broaden its base of support through visible projects.

Third, the keys to agenda setting and development of a specific menu of policy choices included a determined early focus on long time horizons, an emphasis on public learning about growth choices, and attention to the trade-offs implied in policy making—the more ambitious processing model of public engagement, not simple information exchange, to use Cornwall and Gaventa's distinction, and an essential part of active citizenship. But a consistent effort to link big ideas to traditional values, to the symbols of a Mormon pioneer culture, and to everyday life experiences was also key. This approach applied to structured public gatherings as well as to savvy and well-researched public awareness campaigns.

Fourth, having skipped back and forth across the public-private divide—a blurred boundary between quite interdependent institutions in this case—the movement for quality growth in Utah managed to reinvent itself, stage by stage, via the leadership and operational strategy of its influential intermediary organization. As a focal point of civic capacity, Envision Utah has shown an extraordinary commitment to achieving purpose, by adapting without surrendering trademark functions. The succession of chairs and focus of activities reflected this role shift, this evolving to meet priority needs as they emerged: retaining a consensus-

building, leadership-level table for dialogue but also working "in the trenches" with local elected officials and planning staffs as a capacity builder and public educator as well.

This evolution went beyond agenda setting or traditional policy advocacy, then. It captures the coproduction of change that is a hallmark of effective collaboration, and this plays an even bigger role in the India case I examine in the next chapter. In Utah, this approach reflects a deep appreciation of the market's dual role as a *validator* of public support for growth alternatives (a cultural logic) and as a *production device*—in particular, a generator of demonstrations that connect abstract policy and planning ideas to tangible outcomes that can inform the next round of deliberation about the future.

Focused on the roles and capacities of intermediary institutions in public problem solving, table 4.1 captures these linked aspects of legitimacy, influence, and institutional reinvention or adaptation to changing circumstances. It poses a wide array of possibilities, as well as daunting choices, for civic entrepreneurs. With multiple roles come the risk of role conflict and confusion, of sending mixed signals or creating inappropriate expectations. But depending on how well key civic roles are being performed, if they are being performed at all, in particular settings, civic intermediaries have multiple opportunities to focus attention, forge relationships, and broker resources—and to win or lose support from other players.

Fifth, as for democratic accountability and legitimacy, local governments have retained decision-making authority over land use, making the pursuit of growth alternatives a sometimes adversary slog from the advocate's standpoint—what one insider terms "an evolution, not a revolution, of thought"—but providing the movement for quality growth with a very strong claim of accountability to voters. As Susskind and Gensberg (2002) note, this accountability is crucial if consensus-building approaches to contentious issues are to be more widely applied, and a common misperception is that multistakeholder consensus building is a substitute for, rather than an extension of, established institutions of representative democracy. As the next chapter will explore in greater depth, multiple forms of accountability underlie the Utahn and Indian efforts to tackle problems of growth with and beyond the instrument of government. Understanding these multiple forms is particularly important when one's focus is broader than small, face-to-face problem-solving groups or public-private ecosystem management institutions on which environmental researchers have focused (e.g., Weber 2003)—that is, when the focus extends to the very public that not only helps decide

Table 4.1

Civic intermediaries: Problems, roles and capacities

Civic problem or need	Potential go-between roles/niches	Capacities required
Civic process and knowledge problems: real or perceived conflicts among stakeholders, impasse, information breakdowns (data gaps and discrepancies, risk and uncertainty), missing or frayed relationships.	Facilitator and public educator. Educating stakeholders and the public (about other stakeholders, substantive issues and stakes, and options for action), being a data clearinghouse, building and mending relationships, mediating disputes, designing and managing joint problem-solving processes.	Group facilitation and public event management, stakeholder and issue analysis, negotiation and dispute resolution, strategic planning, data and information systems management, public communication, social marketing.
Operational capacity problems: missing capacity, poorly structured or deployed capacity (duplication, fragmentation of effort, "stovepiping").	Coordinator and capacity builder. Coaching and training, developing organizations, coordinating.	Operations management, training, organizational development, strategic planning, program design and evaluation.
Performance and accountability problems: inconsistent or underdeveloped standards, inadequate measures of what other players can do, lack of trust in their competence or approach, insufficient capacity to measure and report back.	Performance investor and monitor. Screening and validating resource seekers, matching donors with recipients, pooling and distributing funds, helping players to define credible performance targets and consequences for non-performance, as well as performance incentives.	Performance measurement and management, evaluation, operations management, management information systems, financial management.
Legitimacy and political support problems: missing or incomplete mandate to act, uneven support among diverse stakeholders, disenfranchised stakeholders.	Organizer. Identifying stakeholder groups and helping them to organize, facilitating coalitions and "building movement," persuasive framing of "the state of the world," engaging media and public figures, helping advocates to develop capacity.	Political organizing and advocacy, data analysis, policy and program design, public communication, negotiation and dispute resolution, training, organizational development.

policy and devise a collective strategy but also implements or undermines it through countless everyday choices about what to consume, where and how to live, and how to use the vote and other forms of pressure politics.

Sixth and finally, the case illustrates how the dialectic of learning and bargaining can be shaped and managed to do significant problem solving. As social learning, the process of using and extending civic capacity to manage rapid urban growth in Utah brought new values, institutions, and options to light, both through small-scale citizen engagement and leadership-level consensus building and through large-scale public education campaigns. The still-early signs are that the process may have shifted public preferences in the region, too, both for alternatives to sprawl and approaches to governing growth, as well as consumer choices about transportation, the physical form of communities and housing types, and more. As bargaining, the process built a broad coalition of interests to back and defend long-range planning (reassuring potential adversaries of their place at the table) and worked informally to deploy the influence of civic leaders in ways that made space for controversial ideas. The process also consistently defended the importance of local decision-making venues, where the details of urban development are still negotiated project by project—now with powerful new growth options, a quality growth frame of reference, and a broader set of growth-related interests in play.

The case suggests, then, not only how learning and bargaining strategies can be sequenced but how the two bring different forms of accountability into play in democratic politics—on the one hand a long-view adherence to deep values and the experimentation on task that is intrinsic to good problem solving, on the other the give-and-take of well-defined interests, in the context of electoral representation and interest-group lobbying, where shorter-run trade-offs must be faced and judgments rendered on particular policies or projects.