
This thesis explores how an ostensible tension between communicative and new urbanist planning theories is played out in practice. In collaborative planning processes that promote compact development, do professional planners facilitate public engagement, or do they advocate for smart growth, and are these roles mutually exclusive? The methodology for addressing this question is based on a qualitative research design that comprises semi-structured, open-ended interviews with public, private, and non-profit sector planners. Long Island, New York is a worthwhile laboratory for this investigation, as a number of progressive municipalities have undertaken collaborative processes – known as visioning initiatives – to engage community-driven, bottom-up planning for downtown redevelopment around Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) stations. This thesis demonstrates that planners effectively balance the roles of facilitation and advocacy in collaborative processes by engaging in shared learning with the local participants. Planners can ethically advocate for smart growth by educating local participants about the benefits of compact development, which, in turn, can facilitate an informed decision-making process among the local participants about the context-specific future of their community. In this way, planners merge their technical expertise with the intangible local knowledge of the participants in the planning process to advance compact development that is appropriately scaled and sensitive to the existing character of the community. Through an investigation of collaborative planning for smart growth on Long Island, this thesis concludes that a comprehensive theory of planning practice must account for the dialectical relationship between process and outcome that defines the planning profession.