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Community Building and a Human-Capital Agenda in Hampton, Virginia:

A Case Analysis of the Policy Process in a Medium-Size City

Clarence Stone
GWIPP

Donn Worgs
Towson State University

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Abstract: Cities, particularly older and land-locked cities like Hampton, Virginia, face intense economic pressure. Their responses, however, are not structurally determined, but involve a significant role for political agency in setting and pursuing an agenda. This case study of Hampton traces how key players saw the problems they faced, the responses they made, and the bundle of skills, strategies, and resources they brought together in responding. Working through city government and a nonprofit concerned with youth development, a group of talented professionals devised a revitalization agenda around the ideas of community building and human-capital development. By devising a process that aligned community resources with city and nonprofit programs, they linked their efforts in mutually reinforcing ways that could be sustained. Thus they created an institutional legacy that could endure even as new issues and new players came on the stage.

"Attention is focused first on this problem and then that problem, but attention is fleeting." (John Kingdon)

Hampton, Virginia, first attracted our attention in 1999, and we have followed developments in the city from that time to the present, the summer of 2004.[1] In the early 1990s, Hampton went through a period of high innovation, putting in place an agenda devoted to the dual aims of community building and human-capital development. Significantly city officials embraced this agenda as means by which an older city could meet the challenge of globalization and pursue revitalization. In that period, city policy accorded to neighborhoods a major role in community problem-solving, and key decision-makers operated from a belief that effective schools, crime control, and even a healthy climate for business investment, all three may hinge on the part less affluent neighborhoods play in the overall life of the city. In their view, if those neighborhoods contribute to community-wide efforts, then a city could enjoy vitality. In short, how to tap neighborhood assets is a key challenge for the long-range prospects of city revitalization, and it had a close tie to human-capital issues. For a period, neighborhoods and human capital enjoyed a top-priority position on the city's agenda. Over time that priority position weakened and became less clear, but how it rose and was institutionalized offers useful insights into the local politics of agenda-setting.[2]

As students of the policy process, we know that ideas play a significant part in how priorities take shape. Agenda setting does not occur in a vacuum, and the structure of the

situation is important. For older cities like Hampton, landlocked by the fact that annexation is not feasible and regional consolidation is not likely, economic competition is a harsh reality.[3] Still, what a city makes of this reality is not structurally determined. Political agency enters the picture, and we examine agency in agenda setting by tracing actions over time. In doing so, we put actions in context by employing the concept of an ecology of engagement, looking at whose efforts are aligned and how. Given that centrifugal forces are strong in all communities, we are particularly interested in conditions favorable to alignment of efforts.

Ecology of Engagement

Our research targets the terms on which major sectors of the city relate to one another around important issues. This is what we mean by an "ecology of engagement." Relevant sectors include those described briefly below: city government, the school system, the business community, parent and neighborhood-based groups, the faith community, racial and other advocacy groups, and the nonprofit sector.

To understand how the ecology of engagement takes shape, inquiry will extend to these specific questions: (1) Which ideas inform practice? (2) Is capacity-building (or, as it is alternatively termed, asset-building) for parents and neighborhoods an objective pursued, and, if so, how? (3) How is cross-sector problem-solving pursued in the areas of educational reform, neighborhood improvement/ community development, and the promotion of well-being for vulnerable children and youth -- that is, are there arrangements that facilitate consultation and collaboration?

Approach to Analysis

The analytical approach we take is developmental. Development may occur along any of several paths. For example, a small initiative can pave the way for further and larger initiatives, perhaps in the process yielding an evolving understanding of the problems to be faced. This could be called a momentum path. Alternatively an initiative might run up against strong resistance, produce unanticipated results, or encounter new issues, thus leading to a reassessment of aims and strategy. This is a reformulation path. Perhaps most often initiatives generate a mixture of these two, some momentum and some reformulation, with momentum stronger at some stages and reformulation stronger at other stages. A developmental approach, then, does not simply inquire into the outcomes of initiatives in "batting average" fashion, asking who won and who lost how

many times. Instead, inquiry focuses on the process of change itself. What ideas and aims take hold and through what means? What resources come into play? If there is reassessment, when does it occur and why?

Change is, of course, a highly elusive phenomenon to study, and we are not aiming for something as grandiose as a general theory of change -- probably no such theory is possible. Our aim is the more modest one of understanding what ideas, resources, and strategic moves help to promote a community-building approach and give support to a human-capital agenda. Similarly, what are the obstacles?

Past research experiences suggest that a snapshot of a community at one point in time may fail to capture the flow of events. By giving close attention to the process of change itself, researchers are better able to see how proximate factors are linked to contextual ones, and how changes in an immediate situation are related to broader events or shifts in the surrounding environment. Factors that are taken as given or fixed in the short run can prove to be variable in a time perspective. In this way, an ecology of engagement is not treated as a static phenomenon, but as something that evolves when significant moves are made and arrangements altered.[4] We follow Hampton over a long enough period to observe the rise of an agenda (and trace significant antecedents), see how it was institutionalized, and follow what happens when that agenda undergoes inevitable changes. Not only does experience accumulate (and seldom exactly as anticipated), but also particular players come and go.

Hampton

Hampton, Virginia has been recognized for its innovative initiatives in city planning and management.[5] This tradition of innovation has manifested itself, for example, in an effort to build stronger ties between schools and neighborhoods through a program called Innovation for Schools, Youth and families, Neighborhoods, and Communities (In-SYNC). An examination of this and related initiatives enables us to observe the shaping of a policy agenda and how it has fared over a period of years. The initial embrace of an agenda leaves open the question of whether it will survive beyond an initial period of enthusiasm (cf. Downs 1972). Our coverage of Hampton begins with a mayoral election in 1982, traces the development of an agenda that took firm shape in the early 1990s, and then follows that agenda for another decade.[6] Our research identifies some key factors

that converged in giving shape to a human capital agenda for Hampton. The city's experience tells us why such program initiatives need to be viewed in context. They arise from a climate of ideas, they depend greatly on the presence of capable policy professionals who have opportunities to exercise their abilities, and they gain or lose momentum as resources can be made available. With the importance of context in mind, we turn now to a brief description of Hampton, followed by an overview of how a human-capital agenda took shape and how it has evolved.

General Characteristics

With a population of 146,437, Hampton qualifies as a medium-size city. Its population is split evenly along racial lines: 44.7 percent African American and 49.5 percent white. The school population of 23,000 is preponderantly African American (60 percent). Of the city's occupied housing units, just over half (58.6 percent) are owner occupied. Renters are a sizeable, but largely unorganized, minority

Hampton has a council-manager government with an elected mayor as a member of a seven-person city council, all elected at-large on a nonpartisan ballot for four-year terms. The terms are staggered so that four seats are up for election in one cycle and three seats are up two years later. The city manager is the chief executive officer of the city, and the mayor has no formal *administrative* powers, but does preside over city-council meetings and has thereby an opportunity to guide discussion and shape the agenda.

Hampton now also elects its school board, also seven members and elected on a nonpartisan ballot for staggered four-year terms. School board elections are a recent change from an appointed board. Three members are elected from each of two wards, and one member is elected at-large. The school district is not an independent taxing authority, but has its budget appropriated by the city council. Procedures are in place, however, to facilitate cooperation between the school system and city hall.

With its nearly even balance between African Americans and whites, Hampton has seen this balance reflected in a three-four Black-white division on both the city council and the school board for a period of years. Over the past several years, the two top executive posts -- the city manager and the school superintendent -- have either both been held by an African American or at least one held by an African American. At this writing, the city manager, George Wallace, is African American, and the newly appointed school superintendent is white. Wallace moved to the top

position after many years as assistant city manager in Hampton. Two previous school superintendents, one African American and one white, also moved to the superintendent's position from with the system. Mamie Locke, the mayor who recently vacated the office to take a seat in the Virginia state senate, was the city's first Black mayor, having previously served as vice-mayor. The city and school staffs are both racially diverse. The current racial balance in top positions is mainly a product of the 1990s, the period in which population reached approximate racial parity. Though the city has had a few racial incidents, a Citizens Unity Commission reflects the city's penchant for consensus building. The city also went through a Study Circles process around the issues of race and diversity. Hampton thus has not experienced the deep racial polarization of some cities in the South, and political alignments cross-cut race in complex ways.

Hampton is a city of neither immense wealth nor great poverty. Though its lower-income population is mostly (but not exclusively) African American, the city has a sizable Black middle class as well, anchored in part around Hampton University, an historically Black college and the city's largest and most prestigious institution of higher education.

The Actors/Sectors.

Hampton's ecology of engagement rests on the following components:

The Public Sector -- The public sector is centered on City Hall and on the city school system. These two elements are the key players in the city's civic life. Most policy initiatives either originate in or are greatly shaped by professionals in the public sector.

Business -- There is no comprehensive city-wide association. The local chamber of commerce is multi-city and not an evident force on most issues in Hampton. Though business is recognized as a key stakeholder, and many appointments to committees and task forces reflect that fact, the business sector is not organized to be a civic presence in the general affairs of the city. There are, however, two major business improvement districts through which development issues are addressed and business interests promoted.

Nonprofit Sector -- The nonprofit sector is populated with some consequential organizations, such as Alternatives, Inc. (a youth development organization) and the Downtown Hampton Child

Development Center, but the city lacks a collective, third-sector force of large consequence. There is a regional United Way, and it provides funding for some Hampton activities, but it is not a policy-shaping actor. There is no broad gauge nonprofit and no general voice for that sector.

The Faith Community -- The faith community is disjoined. It is divided by race and by theology/ ideology in such a way as would hamper any overall unifying effort, and even within the various groupings, fragmentation is high. Still, a consortium of churches does sponsor HELP, a program for the homeless. Black churches are courted at election time, but the significant players in policy matters are individual congregations. Queen Street Baptist is especially notable for its wide-ranging community work, and its senior pastor was recently elected to the school board.

Advocacy Organizations -- Labor unions, teacher organizations, and advocacy groups such as the NAACP are sporadic and infrequent players in the city's civic life, and they are not part of any large or encompassing coalition.

Neighborhood/Civic Associations – Much of the city's civic life is neighborhood focused, and many areas have civic associations. However, there is no longer an independent alliance or federation of these associations. Instead, the city's Neighborhood Office serves as a coordinating body, especially for communities of modest affluence. The city-run Neighborhood College offers individuals a chance to learn about bringing neighborhood interests together and working with the city, but there is no special effort to seek class-inclusive enrollment.

Hampton is not a city of large corporate enterprises, and the U.S. military along with Newport News Shipyard are the largest employers in the area. At the same time, some participants in the city's civic life feel that "old Hampton money" or the propertied interests of "old Hampton" are a significant force to be reckoned with. Their concerns, it is believed, cannot be disregarded with impunity. Others see such a group as mostly a myth, perhaps reflecting a past that has faded. The business sector is active in economic development issues, but the reputation of business generally and "old Hampton" specifically is one of limited engagement in social problems. On most issues, as might be anticipated in a medium-size city, personal connections are extremely important.

Hampton is part of a highly fragmented metropolitan area, divided by the James River and further splintered by the presence of six cities over 100,000 in population. The region's localities find themselves in fierce economic competition with one another. As an older city on the point of a peninsula and unable to annex, Hampton is acutely aware that it lacks large tracts of land with which to compete for suburban growth. Consolidation with Newport News gets sporadic attention, but appears unlikely.

Regional cooperation is very limited, but has a significant voice in the Hampton Roads Partnership. A region-wide nonprofit that enjoys business backing as well as state funding and has an economic development mission, it is headed by James Eason, the former mayor of Hampton. The agenda of the Hampton Roads Partnership includes a human capital element and therefore has a potential to facilitate significant initiatives related to workforce development, including early childhood programs. What impact the Workforce Investment Act will have and whether the Workforce Development boards for the area will pursue a joint strategy remains uncertain at this point. Under the leadership of Hampton's Industrial Development Authority, the surrounding jurisdictions did join in creating a significant new workforce development facility, located next to and strongly supported by the area's community college, Thomas Nelson.

A Tide of Innovation: A Developmental Perspective on Hampton

Beginning in the 1980's, Hampton city government re-formed itself and launched a number of significant program initiatives. Administratively the city moved away from top-down control and flattened the administrative hierarchy while minimizing the force of functional lines of specialization. With both flexibility and accountability in place, the strategy became one of mobilizing around tasks or purposes. For example, the city has created a Neighborhood Task Force to render the provision of services more responsive to neighborhood concern. Major policy initiatives often involve efforts by multiple departments, and sometimes nonprofit or other partners as well. In recent years, this approach has also led to a reduction in friction between the city government and the city school system, friction generated by the city having the responsibility of funding the school system while having no control over how funds are spent. The superintendent and the city manager now produce a joint budget and city council members and school board members generally work together to gain mutual understanding of the revenue and spending constraints facing the city and the schools. In a transition period, after the switch

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to an elected school board, a "buddy" system of paired members of the city council and school board was used to ease tension. With that foundation for cooperation, the city and the school system worked out a funding formula for the schools based on the residential-property base

Following changes in management strategy, the city government also developed a new relationship with the community. Alignment became the guiding principal. Faced with limited revenue, city officials saw the situation as one in which both the government and the community had assets and the challenge was how to promote partnership and get these two bodies of assets aligned – alignment, city officials believed, would magnify Hampton's ability to address major issues. In this approach, citizens in principle become co-producers of city decisions and city services, and they serve as a source of understanding about what city actions should be taken and how.

As the 1980's gave way to the 1990's, under the leadership of the mayor and city manager, Hampton began to give close attention to its human resources. The city's thinking about economic development broadened to include workforce development and investment in human capital. At this writing, the human-capital strategy lacks some of the vigor it had earlier, having suffered some from the unintended consequences of actions by the state government. Below, before considering these cross currents, we first examine the emergence and development of Hampton as a highly innovative city government.

Eason's election

The key event in reshaping Hampton's city government was the election of James Eason as mayor. In May of 1982, Eason was elected to the first of five terms as mayor. He served in that office for 15 years, leaving during his fifth term to head the Hampton Roads Partnership. Eason came into office as no novice in city affairs. His father had served in city government, and Eason was already a member of the city's school board when he decided to run for mayor. The background is illuminating.

In 1981, faced with a bleak revenue picture, the incumbent mayor, Thomas Gear, voiced the pessimistic view that Hampton faced inevitable decline and should adjust its spending and expectations accordingly. Gear was a strong proponent of the anti-government rhetoric of the Reagan era, and he saw no alternative to shrinking government as the city's tax base dwindled.

In fact, at that time, Hampton had a high tax rate compared to surrounding jurisdictions and could hardly afford to raise the levy.

What Gear greeted with resignation, Eason saw as a crisis in need of attention. The city did indeed face the prospect of decline. Its population was stagnant, and the schools were in the midst of a 14-year drop in enrollment. As vice chair of the school board and chair of its finance committee, Eason knew that the education portion of the city budget was, indeed, at a dire point. His immediate response was to turn to the citizenry on how to deal with the financial situation of the city's schools. The response was enormous. Hearings held by Eason had to be moved to the city's coliseum, and they generated a total turnout estimated at 5,000.

Eason's determination to act and his ability to generate a huge public response, no doubt, played a part in his decision to run for mayor. The next year, when Eason ran for mayor, he did so with the message that Hampton could take its destiny in its own hands. Instead of inevitable decline, he talked about "no predetermined outcome." Hampton, he said, could be what it wanted to be.

As mayor, Eason possessed a formidable combination of vision and energy. Coming into office from a position as a senior partner in an accounting firm, Eason was in little danger of being seen as a dreamer. He came across as pragmatic but also as someone attracted to new projects. Eason's key move was to bring in Robert O'Neill as city manager. Starting as a student intern, O'Neill had worked with the city in the 1970's, and subsequently became one of the architects of the "reinventing government" movement. Trained in public administration at Syracuse University, O'Neill was also highly receptive to new ideas and saw the need for fresh and flexible approaches to management. He also embraced the idea that city government needed to take advantage of its context by forming alliances with sundry elements in its environment and making use of the resources they could offer.

By all reports, Eason and O'Neill formed an unusually smooth working partnership. As executives exceptionally open to fresh approaches and new ventures, both men were willing to promote risk taking. They shared a mutual bond of trust, and had a congruent division of labor. Both were comfortable working with the notion of involving the populace, and O'Neill drew on ideas from the 1960's about the virtue of community and citizen engagement.

Many Hampton observers credit the leadership team of Eason and O'Neill with a record of innovation compiled by the city. It is important, however, to see their leadership in context.

By Virginia standards, Hampton had a reputation for being progressive. For example, in the 1960s Hampton was one of the early cities to elect a woman as mayor. And, in the 1970's, the city chose to put into place its own busing plan for school desegregation and not to engage in bitter-end resistance. Hampton provided public housing for low-income residents, and was not shy about using federal programs. Under Hampton's city-manager system, professional development has long occupied an important place. The police chief, Pat Minetti, illustrates the point. Already a proponent of community-oriented policing, he was sent to the Kennedy School at Harvard where he earned a Masters degree in public administration and gained additional exposure to the latest law-enforcement techniques. Subsequently Minetti remained an active member of leading law-enforcement organizations; for example, he was a charter member of the Police Executive Research Forum. He also regularly attended FBI training institutes -- all in an effort to make sure Hampton used the latest policing techniques. In 1980, in the vein of community-oriented policing, Minetti also took innovative measures such as creating a field office in a public housing project. Moving a police unit into an apartment in the public housing complex facilitated personal contact between the officers and the residents. The police department won awards and earned a reputation for innovation based on Minetti's willingness to reform and implement cutting-edge policing practices. Thus, because O'Neill had worked for the city in the 1970's, he knew Minetti and saw first hand that Hampton had a tradition of professional and innovation-minded management.

City government was not an isolated force. In the nonprofit sector, Alternatives, Inc. became an accompanying source of highly competent professionalism and creative thinking. It too has been the architect of award-winning programs.

Though the prospects for decline were genuine when Eason came into office, Hampton was not by tradition a downtrodden community. Rather it was a place with a history of civic pride. Turnout on the school-budget crisis was evidence of that. The pessimism of Eason's predecessor was atypical and therefore provided a target against which Eason could rally.

Thus neither Eason as an elected official nor O'Neill as city manager was operating in a vacuum. Nor were they working strongly against the grain of the city and its tradition. Just the opposite, they could treat Gear's pessimistic pronouncements as a crisis – as something atypical of Hampton tradition – and assert that Hampton could shape its own fate. That sense of efficacy about governance did not have to be created from "whole cloth" but could be evoked by drawing

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on civic tradition and activating a body of capable professionals. Indeed, part of Eason and O'Neill's strategy for governing was to recruit, develop, and retain able professionals by giving them latitude in which they could take on interesting and challenging projects. Eason and O'Neill saw themselves as being able to harness civic energy already in place, and their own sense of efficacy rested on that foundation.

Citizen engagement takes hold

By everyone's account, a planning controversy surrounding a city road precipitated a key development. In the 1980's, as the city moved toward a comprehensive plan, including a major urban roadway, neighborhood opposition organized.[7] Unhappiness about inattention to neighborhoods was longstanding. The city administration was in search of an alternative way of handling issues of planning and zoning. Such issues were often heated and sometimes turned members of the community against one another, putting city officials in the position of seeming to choose sides in a zero-sum gain. Inevitably there were citizens who felt resentment against city government.

O'Neill had learned about a highway controversy in Fort Worth. Realizing that Fort Worth was under heavy citizen assault from which expert analysis offered no respite, the city manager there turned to a consensus process. Drawing on that experience in Texas, O'Neill turned to a conflict resolution group and decided to try the process in Hampton. Under the consensus process, all of the stakeholders in an issue keep negotiating until there is a plan all agree to.

At first a skeptical neighborhood saw O'Neill's proposal as a trick. Initially the city council and Mayor Eason also balked at the idea, seeing it as abdicating their responsibility to govern. However, drawing on the deep bond of mutual trust with the mayor, O'Neill brought Eason around and Eason was able to persuade the council. With the city council committed, the community also came around, but they would not accept an outside consultant as the facilitator. Instead, assistant city manager Michael Monteith was selected for that role. After many months the process yielded a third option, which both the city and the community concluded they could live with even though it had been the first choice of neither side. Then Planning Director Joan Kennedy said the consensus process "came up with ideas we hadn't thought of, and other

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solutions were acceptable compromises. Maybe some of them were not as efficient, but they took account of everyone's concerns."[8]

After the procedure worked in this highly contentious case, it became part of the city's problem-solving repertoire, by one estimate, working about 80 percent of the time. The planning department and the neighborhood office subsequently incorporated this consensus process into their work with neighborhood groups for both revising the comprehensive plan and for working out agreements around neighborhood initiatives. The ideal is that all parties affected by a proposed action are to be included and have a voice in the consensus process. City staff also participate as stakeholders, with the interest of the broad public as a special stake they are charged to uphold. The consensus approach also calls for a division of labor to take shape. Community residents know what they care about and voice their views accordingly. City staff concern themselves with what is technically appropriate and offer judgments about what will actually work.

Preceding the roadway issue, Hampton faced a significant drug problem among its teenage population. Community engagement also played a key role in responding to this issue. In the early 1980's, during the time school enrollment was in decline, there was an extensive problem of drug use among high school students. They were skipping school and making use of "forts and huts" in nearby woods to use drugs. School administrators by themselves were at a loss about how to deal with the issue. The police chief, school superintendent, and Alternatives, Inc., put in place elaborate plans to start with prevention through law enforcement, but to engage youth in dealing with the issue. Working with surrounding neighborhoods, the police had residents videotape students and for one afternoon recorded 200 kids in drug related activity.

With the problem documented, the response called for police to step up surveillance, while Alternatives worked with the youth and the PTA on what was called the student assistance model, a program based on a youth-development approach. By bringing the school system, the police department, the neighborhoods, the PTA, and students together around a common effort (HIPP -- Hampton Intervention and Prevention Project), the initiative provided a major instance of community-based collaboration of the kind O'Neill sought through his evolving management strategy. Combined with the consensus process and planning, this youth initiative laid a foundation for a new direction in city policy to take shape in the 1990's.

A human-capital agenda emerges

As the 1980's gave way to the 1990's, a number of forces converged and gave rise to a human-capital agenda for the city. The mayor and city manager focused on the link between a changing economy and the city's increasing social problems or, in the language of that time, the potential for a sizable "underclass." In December of 1989, city manager O'Neill formed a "working group" of about 40, ranging from city and school officials to executives from NASA and Langley and Newport News Shipbuilding, and including college administrators "to brainstorm for ways to curb dropout rates, drug use and other problems for at-risk children."[9] In his 1990 State of the City message, the mayor put forward workforce development as a top priority. He cited a "serious mismatch" between jobs and available workers, and called for renewed attention to education, including early childhood programs.

Concurrent with these developments, Hampton created the Coalition for Youth as a means by which the city could pursue a collaborative approach in giving more attention to its young children and teenagers. Cindy Carlson moved from the position of director of school and community programs for Alternatives, Inc., to become director of the city's Coalition for Youth. In 1990, Hampton obtained a grant from the federal government's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), which was used to launch a community-wide planning and consultation process under the direction of Carlson.

The Coalition developed a plan of action based on an "extensive research, dialogue, and community outreach process involving over 5,000 Hampton youth and adult citizens."[10] The proposal called for four initiatives:

1. A focus on youth, to keep youth prominent as a matter of concern and priority in the community;

2. Treatment of youth as resources by creating opportunities for youth to be actively involved in community decision-making and the performance of community service;

3. Expanding the system of support for families "with children from birth to school age";

4. Support for neighborhoods, particularly as supports for children and youth and resource centers for families and their children.

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The first initiative evolved into a focus on asset building, and eventually an "asset inventory" conducted in the Hampton City schools. The second initiative gained institutional focus as a Youth Commission, *composed entirely of youth*, who provide advice to the city council and various agencies, on a range of matters from pending legislation to the location and design of community facilities. The Planning Department employs two youth planners, recruited through the Youth Commission. The Commission also receives an appropriation from the city council to make grants for youth-serving activities to various community groups.

In a parallel development, Alternatives, Inc., involved youth in an assessment of its role as a nonprofit concerned with treating youth drug problems. From a problems focus, Alternatives shifted to an emphasis on leadership development and engagement of youth in responsible roles and activities.

The fourth initiative, known as the Healthy Neighborhood Initiative, resulted in the creation of a Neighborhood Office as a department of city government. Charged with leading the effort to develop "healthy neighborhoods," it initially approached the task by trying to increase city responsiveness to neighborhood needs. Joan Kennedy, the chief of the Planning Department, shifted to become the new head of the Neighborhood Office. In this new role, she was also put in charge of a Neighborhood Task Force as a means of focusing city departments on neighborhood concerns and feedback. However, seeing the limitations of relying on that approach alone (especially given limited city resources), the Neighborhood Office now also aims its effort at building capacity in the neighborhoods to meet their own needs. Two neighborhood resource centers help in focusing energies at that level, but the Neighborhood Office works in areas across the city. In doing so, it follows a fourfold approach of outreach, organizing, planning, and developing projects generated by groups based in the neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Commission provides grants, but the city seeks to see that the process is not simply one of grant-seeking but one in which the community shares in building assets for problem-solving. This is no easy process, as the city acknowledged in its own evaluative history -- "Neighborhood work is messy business" and "neighborhood improvement is a slow, steady, people-intensive process."[11]

Neighborhood projects work on the city's consensus principal of including all of the immediately affected parties. Significantly Kennedy headed the Planning Department during the initial consensus process.

The Neighborhood Office provides a major line of connection between the city and its citizens. Its grants and programs are guided by a Neighborhood Commission, composed of commissioners from each of the ten districts into which the city is divided, plus additional members to represent business, the faith community, the school system and other city agencies, and also two youth members from the Youth Commission. The city council appoints the Neighborhood Commission, but ten district nominees are selected in meetings held in the respective districts.   Until this year these meetings were conducted as elections where attendees would vote for one of a group of candidates, and the candidate with the most votes would be recommended for appointment. That process has been discarded in favor of a small-scale consensus process incorporating a range of key stakeholder groups in each of the districts. Meeting participants put forth a consensus candidate to fill the position, who then is appointed by the city council. Thus far the Council has not failed to appoint a candidate selected by any of the districts, under either the old or new selection process.

The neighborhood office also operates the Neighborhood College, a program under which twice a year a select number of citizens go through training on how to work effectively in their neighborhoods and with the city government. Graduates of the program include many of the most influential local activists in the city.

The third proposal resulted in a new entity called the Healthy Families Partnership or HFP. It represents a complex of programs, with parenting classes, information on parenting, and a newsletter on child development available to all parents in the community. With a special appropriation from the city and a strong record of grant seeking, HFP also devotes resources to a program of intensive social work support for families deemed to be at risk for child abuse.

HFP is run by a steering committee composed of several city departments (including Social Services, Health and the Library) along with private partners, particularly hospitals in the area. HFP operates on an "investor" principal rather than a

popular representation principal. All members of the steering committee represent institutions that can contribute resources to "invest in" the program.

Within a short period, as these initiatives took shape, Hampton possessed a new agenda concerned with children and youth. In part, the approach was strategic, aimed at preventing social problems rather than responding with costly treatments after they take hold. The mayor framed the issue as a matter of human capital and workforce development. The city manager and other administrators treated it as a matter of investing resources for the long term. The overall process involved the efforts of both elected officials and a wide array of career professionals in city government and in various non-governmental organizations as well. Planning involved a high level of citizen engagement, though in a process structured by city officials and other institutional élites. The new Hampton agenda also provided for ongoing citizen engagement -- the Neighborhood Commission, youth through the Youth Commission and other citizens through the Neighborhood College, annual events such as Neighborhood month, and a consensus approach to planning. The city committed significant resources to this agenda, but so also did other institutions. And citizens themselves contributed significantly through their own activities and through their efforts to obtain grants and other forms of external support. The city gained attention in the national media, and that helped sustain early momentum. HFP has particularly benefited from national coverage.

City Manager O'Neill and Mayor Eason played central parts in establishing a partnership approach in which the city and the community both contributed to problem-solving. Citizens, including youth, served as sources of information and understanding. They also contributed resources. Instead of seeing an active citizenry as a troublesome body to be neutralized and held at bay, city officials treated citizens as contributors to the well being of Hampton. Efforts to align city government and the community also gave citizens opportunities to appreciate better the role that city staff play. As one of the participants in the planning process commented, "The biggest thing I got out of the consensus group was that the city government and the staff were not the enemy."[12]

This is not to suggest that all was smooth sailing. Eason, in particular, had vocal critics. Some of the downtown development projects came under significant flack, and Eason himself got criticism for being too "controlling." Though the Neighborhood

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Office and its head, Joan Kennedy, received wide praise, a few people saw the city office as preempting a role that should be played by a non-governmental federation of civic associations.

Community Centers

City hall did not stand alone in the embrace of more active engagement from citizens. At the neighborhood level, some grass-roots leaders also pushed for a meshing of efforts by city and citizenry, contributing importantly to the city's growing support for community centers and neighborhood learning centers. This process was not without friction. It meant resource demands on a city caught in tight fiscal constraints, and educators and city employees did not always welcome the involvement of citizens.

The Y.H. Thomas Community Center illustrates the process. During the desegregation process of the 1970s, Hampton closed several African American schools, one of which was the Y.H. Thomas Junior High School, located in the heart of a sizeable Black neighborhood. After years of neglect, the city decided to tear down the old building in 1992. Interestingly, this decision galvanized the community, which opposed the decision for both symbolic and practical reasons.

The school had been the only Black junior high school in the city, and thus was training ground for many of the city's Black leaders. It was a symbol of education in the Black community. On a more practical level, community members saw the building as a facility that could be used to the benefit of the neighborhoods youth. Recreational facilities were in short supply, and the city's YMCA not only charged fees, but was also seen as not amenable to a special effort to expand services for African Americans. A coalition of community leaders and Y. H. Thomas alumni, led by Will Moffitt, a neighborhood leader with a special interest in children and youth, proposed that the city renovate Y.H. Thomas and convert it into a community center to be run by volunteers. The city hesitated to take on the cost of renovation, and some employees in Parks and Recreation were fearful that extensive use of volunteers posed a threat to their jobs. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles and initial wariness on both sides, Moffitt negotiated an agreement and the city found itself with a new community center fully run by volunteers. Once opened it proved to be hugely successful, with a wide array of

programs including a learning center for after-school hours. Some years later, with expanded programming, Moffitt negotiated a paid executive director, and as well as other part-time paid positions for the center.

In another Black neighborhood, a retired schoolteacher, Mary Johnson, also led a grass-roots initiative to preserve an historic building and convert it into the Newtown Learning Center. She made explicit use of the language of asset building, partnership, and neighborhood planning to garner city support as well as external resources from the corporate community and special assistance for historic preservation from the state. The nearby middle school, however, proved to be a less than eager partner. Still Mary Johnson had a close connection with the Neighborhood Office, and the idea of neighborhood learning centers eventually came to enjoy significant support from the school system, even though much of the push behind them came form the Neighborhood Office and Cindy Carlson of the Coalition for Youth.

In both instances initiative came from the citizenry, not city government. In the early stages some resistance came from the government-sector side, but the official city position favored alignment of efforts and resources from government and citizenry. Moreover, within city government there were important allies for this policy. Built on earlier experiences, the city-wide community planning process and the structural changes it set in motion thus paid off in receptivity to grass-roots initiatives. Both Will Moffitt and Mary Johnson were graduates of the Neighborhood College, and it should be noted, neither was simply pressuring the city government to provide a facility. In both cases they developed channels for significant citizen contributions, meeting the condition of alignment.

Schools come on board

Hampton's public schools occupy a central place in the city. Education represents half of the city budget, and the reputation of the schools has a major influence on the city's ability to attract business investment and to retain its middle class population. In the 1970's, desegregation led some whites to pull out of the city's schools, and enrollment declined from 32,000 in 1973-74 to below 19,000 14 years later. The HIPP

initiative sought to remedy a serious drug problem but dropout rates and low test scores indicated a wider problem.

Eason believes strongly in the importance of education and, as noted earlier, he served on the Hampton school board prior to his election as mayor. Neither he nor the city management staff, however, had much leverage over the school system even though the city council appropriated school funds and, until 1997, appointed members of the school board. Hampton's education system operated with a high degree of independence. For a time, city officials perceived the schools as unreceptive to partnership arrangements and reluctant to develop new relationships. Instead of seeing the community as a source of help, school administrators seemed to regard the citizenry as simply an external force, perhaps even a threatening force. Again, as in most cities, the school system was highly centralized, with a strong tendency to command from the top. Prior to the adoption of Virginia's Standards of Learning, information about performance was sometimes hard to obtain.

The 1990's saw a climate in which school administrators could alter the old practices. The newly appointed school superintendent, Billy Canady, had been an assistant superintendent for secondary schools and part of the HIPP partnership. Though initially cautious about such steps as an "asset inventory" (perhaps fearful that "asset" reports might lead to negative labels for some schools), he came aboard, and also embraced the idea of youth development and student involvement. He established a youth advisory group to work with his office and called for the city's secondary schools to take the same step. With changes in the PTA leadership, the superintendent also developed a cooperative working relationship with that group. State regulations reinforced the trend toward community engagement by calling for each school to develop a "report card" on its performance, which must be presented to the community.

The Hampton school system goes further and requires each school to form a team to develop and monitor a school plan. The teams include a mix of staff and community members, headed by the principal. In addition, the procedure for evaluating principal performance specifies parent and community involvement as one of the areas of assessment.

When state law allowed Virginia jurisdictions to opt for elected school boards, Hampton by referendum approved the change. The seven-member board remained at that size, but the city divided the electorate into two districts, each electing three members, with the seventh member elected at large. The two districts divide racially so that one elects three African American members and the other three white members. To date, the member selected at large in two succeeding elections has been white.

With an elected school board, the city government and school system found themselves at odds over the education budget and in harsh debate. This turn of events overlapped with the accession to office of a new mayor (Eason resigned to head the newly formed Hampton Roads Partnership) and a new city manager (O'Neill departed at this time as well). The new manager, George Wallace, had served as assistant city manager in O'Neill's administration and had been with the city for most of his career. At this point, the city manager and the school superintendent were African American and the mayor and the chair of the school board were white. Both the city council and the school board had four white and three African American members. Race, however, was not an apparent factor in the budget dispute. It was more a matter of a clash of two large public institutions. Building on Hampton's tradition of collaboration, City Manager Wallace initiated a process to resolve the conflict. The city council and school board developed a "buddy system" under which each council member was paired with a school board member. They met monthly in a one-on-one private meeting (a group of three would be subject to Virginia's public meeting requirement), with briefing papers prepared jointly by city and school staff, to discuss issues.

As the school system goes through its budget planning, an assistant city manger, as well as a PTA member and other community representatives, serve as members of the system's budget team. The school system also has a representative in the city's budget process, and a similar cross mixing of staff participation occurs in the strategic planning process for the city and for the school system. (Already in place before this time, as mentioned above, the school system has representation on the Neighborhood Commission.) With this new set of arrangements in place (along with funding by formula), budget deliberations returned to amicability, but not without occasional points of tension. Nonetheless, some observers believe that the elected school board has

become a less constructive force than was its appointed predecessor. Televised meeting, some believe, encourage posturing by school board members, concerned with reelection. Some observers also believe that the time and other demands of electoral politics push business and civic elites away from involvement in education, leaving the field more open to single-issue candidates.

Moving toward neighborhood schools

In the mid 1990's, the school system faced the problem that the attendance districts in place no longer fit the facilities available, especially with enrollment decline reversed. In addition, busing was costly, and the city faced a potential need to replace or even expand its fleet of buses. From this beginning point, with the superintendent's encouragement, discussion moved to the possibility of shifting "back" to the concept of neighborhood schools, particularly for elementary schools ("back," however, was complicated by the fact that many schools in predominantly African American neighborhoods had been closed in the 1970's.) The school board appointed a task force with broad membership, and open to additional volunteers. Meetings were public, and generated some heated discussion, particularly about the city's Fundamental Schools. These are schools in which parents sign a contract to support high standards, steady attendance, and student homework. Parents also provide transportation. The Fundamental Schools were put into place to appeal to and retain middle class families, and some of the PTA leaders and school board members have been staunch defenders of these schools. Clearly these schools do not fit neatly into a neighborhood school's policy because student enrollment is tied to the requirement of a signed agreement and parent-provided transportation.

Another point of concern was equity in the provision of resources to schools. The NAACP expressed some worry that heavily middle class schools, such as the Fundamental Schools, might get a disproportionate share of the resources. Though reassurances on this score were not entirely satisfying, no major battle occurred. The most intense discussion centered on the attendance boundaries for the remainder of the city's schools. The task force worked through these worrisome issues, left the Fundamental Schools in place, and recommended a Neighborhood Schools Policy, and

that was followed by appointment of an implementation committee. Meanwhile, superintendent Canady addressed some of the worst-performing schools by putting in innovative principals, reducing class size, and in a few places, drawing on a year-round calendar as a means for academic enrichment.

The substance of the new policy lacked details, but significant moves began to flesh out a policy. The Neighborhood Office, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Coalition for Youth played key roles in facilitating the development of Learning Centers for less affluent neighborhoods. Some were attached to schools, others were in separate facilities. In some, the initiative came from the neighborhoods themselves, and in some cases from city staff.

The development of Learning Centers dovetailed with a concerted effort to promote school-neighborhood partnerships, and aim at the core of the evolving neighborhood schools policy. The superintendent and others like Assistant City manager Michael Monteith were eager to involve caring adults in schools.

The partnership goal gained further impetus with the launching of a new initiative, In-SYNC (Innovations for Schools, Youth and families, Neighborhoods and Communities). The Neighborhood Office and the school system supported this effort by jointly creating a staff position, filled by a former principal, Michael Canty. The official mission of In-SYNC was to build "neighborhood-based partnerships that maximize and mobilize family and community resources to promote strong schools and youth success."[13] In-SYNC developed a "Neighborhood Initiated Action Model," which embodied a number of practices characteristic of Hampton's asset-building mode of operation. It was essentially a community-development model calling for a wide array of community stakeholders to meet, gather information on assets and needs, and plan a course of action including such activities as after school, GED, and job development programs. These programs were expected to contribute to outcomes identified in the strategic plans of the city of the school system. The plan of action also included the goal of creating partnerships "to leverage assets and find new resources."

The neighborhood schools policy continues to evolve, and has narrowed its focus somewhat to emphasize after-school programs and meet the challenge of Virginia's high-stakes testing. Over a period of years, Hampton schools have moved from a one-time

pattern of closing their doors at three o'clock to a new pattern of being more open to using their facilities as part of a broader effort, with Parks and Recreation, to respond to the development needs of children.

Cross Currents

<u>Challenges in sustaining a human-capital agenda</u>

In many ways, the emergence of an initiative such as In-SYNC makes a remarkable story. It is, however, a complex story, and for that reason it can illustrate how a single initiative needs to be understood in its full context.

In-SYNC grew from a number of other initiatives and represents a long-standing effort to bridge divides between the school system and the city government and between schools and their communities. Its antecedents also lie in particular actions such as HIPP, the 1980's program that brought city government, school officials, PTA, and neighborhood residents together in a combined effort. It also stemmed directly from the evolving policy of neighborhood schools. It rested as well on earlier moves, which included an approach to governance shaped by the ideas of Eason and O'Neill, refined in experiences such as the use of the consensus process in planning. Finally it was integrally connected to the presence of a Neighborhood Office.

The Neighborhood Office initiative itself, it should be noted, grew out of a focus on youth and families ("to make neighborhoods better places for children and families").[14] Though a neighborhood approach tends to bring housing and land-use issues to the forefront, Hampton's Neighborhood Office has nevertheless succeeded in keeping broader considerations active. Youth and families were the focus of the 1991 community-planning process (which led to the creation of the Neighborhood Office), but keeping them front and center is no easy matter. School staff see parent involvement as difficult to maintain, and city staff struggle to move neighborhood residents beyond continuing concerns about drainage and street upgrades to think about less tangible matters such as the social health of the city.

Though the flow of events in which In-SYNC became a part started with ideas held by Eason and O'Neill, as we saw earlier, the mayor and city manager did not operate in a vacuum. Moreover, their ideas underwent significant evolution in instances such as

the framing of a human-capital agenda in response to their understanding of a changing economy and its implications for workforce development. That agenda itself took shape because Eason and O'Neill had a wide vision of the world around them, and they therefore consulted widely.

In-SYNC also owed much to the infusion of ideas surrounding the concept of asset-building. Important as the duo of Eason and O'Neill was, they were only two members of a much larger body of progressive-minded officials and policy professionals. In addition to George Wallace, who moved up to the city manager position after O'Neill's departure, assistant managers Michael Monteith (who recently retired) and Mary Bunting have also been mainstays of Hampton's "reinvented" governance. Monteith, for example, was the facilitator for the consensus-planning process, and a contributor to the human-capital agenda generally and In-SYNC in particular.

Hampton's city staff are closely attuned to ideas circulating in the national arena through professional associations and conferences, such as the National League of Cities' Congress of Cities. It was from the latter, that Cindy Carlson of the Coalition for Youth and Joan Kennedy of the Neighborhood Office gained exposure to asset-building. Hearing about ideas, of course, matters only if those hearing them have the skill and vision to make concrete applications, as indeed they did in Hampton.

In-SYNC illustrates how a single initiative is best seen, not as an isolated effort, but as an action within a much wider web of actions. In-SYNC also illustrates that the wider web is not all of a supportive nature. The original aim was to have In-SYNC work for extensive community-school partnerships in all of the city's neighborhood schools. As it turned out, the focus narrowed to working primarily with a set of community centers/neighborhood learning centers and after-school programs of varying levels of programming. Why? Two forces have asserted themselves.

One is the state-imposed Standards of Learning; schools face loosing accreditation if they do not achieve satisfactory scores on state testing. This form of high-stakes testing has focused school officials on the immediate task of raising scores. Longer-term issues, such as building partnerships with the community – though they may eventually contribute to improved test scores – hold less urgency than the immediate task. School officials are thus deflected from greater attention to In-SYNC and constrained by

a potential loss of state accreditation to give central attention to classroom preparations for Standards of Learning tests. Thus, though school administrators support building connections with the community and place a value on such projects as having members of the Fire Department and other city agencies come into the elementary schools and read to the children, they see the promotion of such activities as a responsibility of the city, not of the school system.

The second factor is money, the scarcity thereof. Hampton faces a significant revenue squeeze, in part because it is an older, built-up community without the growth prospects of "edge city" development. Hampton's revenue base has also taken a hit from the partial phasing out of Virginia's car tax (the one part of the property tax experiencing growth in older communities). State revenue itself is in shortfall, and the replacement funding offered by the state for phasing out the car tax froze revenue at the point of enactment. That has shifted attention to sales and entertainment-industry taxes. Returns from investing in projects that could increase these revenues have a strong attraction. In the meantime, caught in a budget squeeze, the city has limited funding for In-SYNC, even for the learning centers covered by the program.

After-school programs provide a link between broad youth-and-family concerns, and for that reason enjoy wide support. Federal funds help, but are not adequate to meet all of Hampton's needs. Leveraging assets and locating new resources thus assumes special urgency as In-SYNC continues to evolve and make use of after-school programs. The initiative is now in a position familiar to many nonprofits – it must expend considerable energy in securing external resources simply to sustain the efforts already initiated. The state unwittingly has put into motion forces that work against broad concerns with families and children.

Few players in Hampton see the state government as a supportive factor for local innovation. Indeed, at times the Virginia Social Services Department has been critical of some local efforts. For example, under the previous governor, who had close ties to the Christian Right, some of his appointees saw social work with at-risk families under the Healthy Families Partnership as unwarranted intervention into private family life.

Moreover, with Republican control in the state legislature, coupled with the retirement of such a key figure as Senator Hunter Andrews, Hampton is no longer in a

strong position to get the kind of ad hoc assistance for special projects that the city received in the past. For the most part, then, to continue to be innovative in the human-capital arena, Hampton has to overcome barriers put up by the state but can look to the state for little assistance.

One of the few instances in which the state helped stimulate local innovation was in the area of early childhood development. About the time the Healthy Families Partnership was launched, the Virginia Council on Child Daycare and Early Childhood Programs (now folded into the state's social services department) sought to promote collaborative programs for the transition into kindergarten. The Coalition for Youth pulled together a group to apply for grants to plan and put into place a project for four year olds called STEPS (Successful Transition for Parents and Students). The state agency specified that the program for four-year olds had to be a collaborative project; it could not be a program simply run by local school systems. Hampton received funding and launched the program. Subsequently Virginia made the program statewide. It is now termed the Virginia Preschool initiative. With state funding, Hampton was able to expand from the early program, covering 120 children to coverage for 270. Hampton's program guarantees slots for children under HFP, but has to use a waiting list because demand for the program exceeds the funding available. Until the current fiscal year, with tax-cutting in sway, Virginia had not moved to significantly increase its support for the program in order to bring more children into its coverage, even though TANF or possibly foster care money could be directed to that purpose. Under Governor Mark Warner, state funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), which requires local matching funds, increased by $13 million to $51 million. The increase will allow Hampton to expand its four-year old program from serving sixty percent of at-risk four year olds not served by federal government programs, in the 2003-2004 school year, to serving ninety percent in the upcoming school year, and, it is hoped, 100 percent the next year. It is notable though, that support remains confined to four-year olds, though scattered talk continues about the need for expanded programs for those three and under.

Hampton, of course, has a Head Start program as well. In addition, the Downtown Hampton Child Development Center is a nonprofit that the city helps to support, and it serves a number of children from families of limited means. Prior to the

expansion of the VPI, in combination about 700-800 children per year went through one or another of the city-supported early childhood programs. An additional 400-500 would go to other programs (profit and nonprofit) fully paid for by parents. With about 2,000 new students in kindergarten each year, this means that fewer than 2/3 of Hampton's children were enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs, prior to the expansion of the VPI, and at least 25-30 percent of four year olds will still not be enrolled even with the states increased funding. Moreover, some of the city and school staff believe that not all the child-care facilities in the city provide "developmentally appropriate" programs. They also note that this is an issue the state has not taken on.

In the 1990s, with encouragement from city manager O'Neill an Early Childhood Task Force formed to make recommendations, including a means by which the city could help promote the kind of pre-kindergarten programs that would further learning readiness. The Task Force proposal called for a position of coordinator or "advocate" for early childhood. Some members of the task force saw the newly created STEPS program as a potential launching pad for an early childhood counterpart to the Coalition for Youth. Taking a cue from a program run by the City of Alexandria, the Hampton Task Force called for the city to make small grants to encourage non-city providers to enhance their programs. The Task Force also saw the advocate position as one that might persuade businesses to provide programs for employees. The recommended staff person could also serve as a grant-writer in seeking to promote a more comprehensive effort and foster innovation. The city's strategic plan called for an effort to "increase school readiness," and O'Neill, along with other city administrators, provided strong encouragement.

Joanne Fama, the school system's Assistant Superintendent for Elementary and Early Childhood was a key figure on the Task Force and brought the weight of her office to bear. However, the Task Force recommendation came to the city in 1999, at the time she was retiring from her school position. In the meantime, O'Neill had left, and the new city manager was in office. The city faced a worsening revenue situation, and City Manager Wallace, with significant but not unanimous council backing, focused on a proposed convention center as a way to respond to the city's revenue needs. In addition, for-profit daycare providers were seen as being highly wary of any public-sector move to address standards. They were also believed to be worried by possible expansion of city-

supported daycare. The city put aside the Task Force recommendation, and, with Fama's retirement, the task Force dissolved into inactivity. Subsequently the school system failed to free up additional space for early childhood education.

Hampton's experience with In-SYNC and the Early Childhood Task Force illustrate the difficulties a city faces in sustaining momentum behind a human-capital agenda. Innovative and well-conceived initiatives are not enough. Important as a favorable climate of ideas is and vital as high-capability professionals are, a revenue-strapped city finds it very hard to put scarce monies into a long-range strategy in investment in human capital. The funding by Virginia for the STEPS program shows what a constructive part the state could play, but that first initiative lacked follow-through (but with recent state-funding allowing again for expansion). Other state moves, such as the partial car-tax repeal have aggravated the city's revenue position. The city could, of course, shift spending priorities, as it did in launching the Healthy Families Partnership, but that kind of long-term strategic thinking is rare.

The limits of coordination

In many ways, Hampton provides an extraordinary example of coordination and collaboration. O'Neill's flattened management structure combined with accountability for task performance bridged lines of functional specialization to a high degree. Planning and neighborhood development bridged an even wider gulf bringing city government into partnership with citizen groups, business, and other non-governmental organizations. City manager Wallace's response to city-school conflict over finance has, along with companion moves, greatly lessened the isolation of the school system,[15] and now joint planning and budgeting seem established (although capital budgeting has recently proved to be a friction point). The city's Parks and Recreation Department and the school system continue an important collaboration in providing recreational facilities and the upkeep of those facilities. The Parks and Recreation Department has also contributed to the development of learning centers.

Alignment occupies a prominent place in Hampton discourse about problem solving. The Healthy Families Partnership is itself a remarkable feat of collaboration, joining the efforts of various city departments such as Health, Social Services and the

Library as well as bringing in hospitals from the private sector. The HFP makes use of the early childhood program, and it also gets voluntary support from the business sector for such matters as meals for participants in parenting classes.

Yet, to a significant degree, the HFP marches to its own drummer, and it is not clear that parenting lessons enjoy receptivity in some of the lower-income communities. The HFP faces a special challenge in serving at-risk families in a community that is preponderantly middle class. The Steering Committee sees a clear need for HFP to serve all of the community, and they rightly claim that all segments of the community can gain from more information about child development and from practical lessons in parenting. Family Resource Centers, newsletters to parents, and pertinent library materials are widely available. But if the HFP were seen as a program for the poor, then most middle class households might stay away from it. Not only would the program thereby lose some clientele who could benefit from its services, but the HFP might lose political support if it were seen as serving only a segment of the community. Parenting classes for all thus holds a central place in public information about the program. Classes are held in HFP facilities in a central location to avoid the appearance of catering to a particular income, racial, or geographic group.

The social work staff of HFP does work with a small number of families deemed to be at risk for child abuse, and these same families have first claim on slots in the city's pre-kindergarten program. But parenting classes for all provides a universal cover under which special needs can be addressed.

The HFP Steering Committee, as an "investor group," is constituted on a different principal from any other activities in Hampton. It is not based on wide consultation among all of the stakeholders, but on the participation of those who can commit resources to a designated task. Wide consultation, some fear, would be immobilizing. Family matters generate strong and diverse feelings. The structure and operation of the HFP reflect a need to provide political cover and keep conflict in check. Other arms of the city operate on different principles. The centrality of its parenting classes for the HFP may work against coordination with entities that have different missions.

Discussion

Hampton stands in sharp contrast with many cities. Across a range of issues, problem-solving activities center in city government. No organization representing the collective interest of business plays a major part. Neither is "big-time" philanthropy a significant force in the civic life of Hampton – no foundations and no wealthy individuals have a history of bankrolling large projects in Hampton. As a medium-sized city, outside the major media markets, Hampton draws limited attention from national foundations, and it has no home-town foundations. It is not a place of great wealth or a headquarters site for big corporations. Significant nonprofits, like Alternatives, Inc. and the Downtown Child Development Center, are themselves tied closely to the public sector. Even the structure of citizen engagement rises mostly from the initiatives of public officials; the Neighborhood Commission is the leading case in point.

Operating principals

The citizen-government relationship is a relatively open one. From citizen appointments to the strategic planning committee through various hearings to annual citizen surveys, there are opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns -- if they are disposed to do so. The planning process in particular brings the community into official deliberations, though it should be noted that this is a practice for residential neighborhoods and it did not apply to the development of the city's convention center and related facilities in that commercial corridor. Other than that example, with a notable exception of the Steering Committee for the Healthy Families Partnership, most committees, boards, and task forces operate on a principal of stakeholder inclusion. Still, initiative typically rests with the city's public policy professionals.

The set of governing arrangements put in motion by Mayor Eason and City Manager O'Neill rested on two principles. One was to make maximum use of policy professionals by providing them with the administrative flexibility to do meaningful work. This is what the "reinventing government" literature terms an entrepreneurial culture. As mayor, Eason gave a special boost to this entrepreneurial culture by articulating the theme that Hampton had its destiny in its own hands; the city could be what it wanted to be. To the message that decline was inevitable, Eason responded that

the city faced no forgone conclusion. The challenge he saw was for Hampton to do what it will take to be a quality place to live and work. This is an energizing vision and, combined with a flexible management approach, it provided a context in which an impressive array of creative and talented managers and policy professionals developed a number of innovative programs. That many of the city's staff stayed with the city for long years when they could have easily moved to new positions is itself an indication of high morale. City Manager O'Neill understood that the opportunity "to do interesting and challenging things" is a strong motivator for many people who choose to work in the public sector.

The second principal is one that treats the citizenry as contributors to governance, as both a source of understanding/information and as a wellspring of resources. O'Neill and other members of his management team saw the matter as one of alignment, with both the community and the government providing assets that could be applied to problem-solving. Citizens have knowledge from their personal experience of the situation. Public-sector professionals have expertise but it needs to be complemented by the "local knowledge" of citizens. Because all affected parties can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the problems faced, public officials have a responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders be a party to a planning and problem-solving action. Professional staff also see that technical feasibility gets included in deliberations. For the citizen's part, they should acknowledge that the resources of city government are limited and need to be augmented by citizen effort. A premise of the Eason/O'Neill approach is that by aligning government and community in a joint effort, the force of both is increased. Particularly the Planning Department and the Neighborhood Office operate on that principal and In-SYNC represents an effort to extend that principal to education. The Parks and Recreation Department has also followed this principal in several key instances.

Hampton is not a place where all is "sweetness and light" between citizens and government. Eason's leadership in particular came under some sharp criticism, and in that period two members of the city council provided dissident voices over a range of issues. The consensus process brought into play in the 1980's planning dispute was

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introduced, not to give voice to pre-existing harmony, but to respond to deep citizen distrust and to try to avoid a sharp division into winners and losers.

The work of the Neighborhood Commission, the Neighborhood College, the planning process, cooperation between school superintendent Canady and the PTA, the engagement of youth, and the activities of community and neighborhood centers are visible signs of alignment. Citizens do contribute. The Y. H. Thomas Community Center is an extraordinary instance in which activities at the outset were run on an all-volunteer basis (and still are to a large extent). The center, however, came into being through a form of alignment. The city provided the facility, and now provides funds to help support Y.H. Thomas's learning center. Y. H. Thomas has also used AmeriCorps. To be noted, however, is the fact that this city/community partnership came into being through a struggle, and the partnership had to overcome a significant level of distrust to become an operating reality. It offers an example of alignment around a common task as a means of achieving a cooperative relationship. Action contributed to heightening trust; trust did not precede city/community interaction.

The Queen Street Baptist Church is another example of alignment. The church has a number of programs and initiatives that it runs that contribute to community building agenda. Led by the Reverend Clary, a minister with extensive community development and nonprofit experience, the church is an active participant in civic initiatives and runs its own extensive programs including a food cooperative, health education programs, adult education, computer training, housing programs, and others. Most interesting are the instances where the church has partnered with the city and the school system. Queen Street has continuously worked with the school system to operate after-school tutorial programs in as many as twelve schools. It has partnered with the city government in a number of instances as well. The church has run one of the neighborhood learning centers supported by the city and provided staff and coordinated volunteer activities for one of the two neighborhood resource centers. The church continues to provide programming for both of these centers as well as others.

The church also bought a building from the city (for one dollar) to house the activities of its nonprofit organization, Beacon at the Crossroads. The Reverend Clary views the work of the church to be city-wide, rather than just an area surrounding the

church, and he understands his church's civic role as part of a wave of activities in the city. The programs of the church entail work that city government itself could not do. In short, the church complements the work of city government and provides an important form of alignment that springs up from the community. Its role resembles that of neighborhood organizations, but Queen Street Baptist carries on a wider array of activities and may well be better positioned to sustain its effort.

<u>Misses in the alignment process</u>

Alignment does not mean that friction is absent, and it does not mean that everyone is fully represented. Though political alliances in Hampton do not coincide with the racial divide, race is a continuing source of tension. (At-large elections for the city council may have survived a referendum and other challenges only because African American representation increased to three of seven members. However, the most recent city election saw the number drop to one.) Class is a less visible factor. But homeowners are much more a factor than renters in the city's problem-solving process.

Alignment, not surprisingly, is imperfect. Inside influence occasionally trumps community engagement in telltale ways. In 1990, the consensus-planning process was followed by a political setback. As noted in one account, "to the chagrin of the Working Committee" that carried out the process, participants saw the plan modified when the city council removed one of the proposed road networks that "would have increased traffic in an affluent neighborhood" where two members of the city council lived.[16] City council embrace of the consensus process was clearly less than complete. Recently, when School Superintendent Billy Canady left, the board of education initially appointed a broad-based committee to conduct a national search. However, after a preemptive mobilization by education insiders and their allies, the school board hurriedly moved the interim superintendent (a long-time member of the school staff with deep personal ties in the city) into the permanent slot before a national search could be launched.[17] Even though education had emerged as a priority concern in the city's strategic planning procedure, engagement of the wider community gave way to insider pleas for continuity and quick action.

<u>The tenuousness of a human capital agenda</u>

Despite the groundwork laid and reinforced by Eason, O'Neill, and other members of their team, Hampton faces an uncertain future in maintaining priority for a human-capital agenda. That the city is in a weak revenue position works against long-term programs. In many places, the search for a quick fix is a ready temptation, especially for new administrators looking for a high visibility project on which to put their signature. Despite that pattern, under Eason and O'Neill, Hampton took a long-term approach and embraced a human-capital agenda, a weak revenue position notwithstanding. As the 1980's gave way to the 1990's, the Eason/O'Neill duo took the position that Hampton needed an economic development strategy not easily duplicated by other cities. Hampton's leadership saw human-capital effort as something that responded to the changing nature of the contemporary economy while contributing to Hampton's livability.

Agendas, however, do not live on vision alone. Cities are greatly affected by their subordinate position in the nation's scheme of intergovernmental relations. State actions can play a significant part in facilitating or hindering a locality's agenda. Thus Virginia gave a temporary boost to Hampton's human-capital momentum when it put monies into a program to promote collaboration around early childhood. Hampton responded with the STEPS program. However, absent a state follow-through to expand support or make innovative use of federal TANF (under the 1996 welfare legislation) or foster-care funds, Hampton's momentum was arrested. Though state funds have increased, and expansion of the preschool programs seems likely, it will remain difficult to get substantial attention from the school system, as the systems impetus behind early childhood has been deflected by, among other things, high-stakes testing under the state-mandated Standards of Learning. Further, with Virginia (now reinforced by No Child Left Behind at the national level) pressing local school systems to produce immediate results, it is hard to establish a broad foundation for *long-term* improvements in school performance. As a result, In-SYNC had to concern itself with available opportunities more than carving out new ones, and it has to accommodate to the heavy emphasis on test-score results.

State actions thus have provided little support for Hampton's community-building and human-capital agenda, and instead has, at times, put roadblocks in the way. By the

combination of squeezing local revenue and pressuring for immediate improvements in test-score results, Virginia has given Hampton limited room to determine its own destiny.

As an older and land-locked city, Hampton holds a largely unfavorable position in the affairs of Virginia. It is not the state capital and is but one of the moderate-sized municipalities in its metropolitan region. At this writing, state-level politics are in a degree of flux with a Democratic governor and Republican legislative majorities, but for Hampton a harsh fact is that the legislature, particularly with a Republican majority, tends to see as its primary constituency suburban and rural/small town populations, not the citizenry of Hampton and other older cities.

Postscript

As the 1990s gave way to a new century, the momentum of the earlier era began to subside. Key players vacated important positions, starting with Eason's departure in 1997. Eason was followed by three short-term successors. Robert O'Neill's heir as city manager, George Wallace, was thus in a particularly strategic position. He has long experience as assistant city manager in Hampton and, when he moved up, became the city government's first Black chief administrator.

With the city's fiscal squeeze heightened by state tax policy, Wallace moved aggressively on an economic development agenda, pushing hard for a long-discussed but controversial convention center. In this venture, citizen engagement gave way to counter concerns over disclosure in a circumstance of economic competition. Significant opposition from citizens and a minority of the city council no doubt contributed to a turn on this issue away from broad community engagement.

Other changes added to the fluidity of the situation. The founder of Alternatives Inc. retired, but again an insider moved into the top position. Canady's successor as school superintendent kept much of the school system's community engagement process in place, but he left office after a relatively brief tenure. As the 2004 election approached, new alliances began to take shape. At this time (summer of 2004), it is not clear what the new political landscape will be, but policy continuity seems more likely than abrupt change. The new mayor and his city council allies have been critical of recent economic-development efforts and limited consultation, but also have indicated

that they support moving ahead with plans already in place. As noted by a city hall reporter, changes "could be more about style than substance."[18]

Conclusion

At the heart of Hampton's experience is an action-minded group of policy and management professionals, open to new approaches and in touch with the wider world of ideas. This group shows how important intellectual climate is to public-sector innovation. They played a central role in promoting a problem-solving alignment between city hall and the community. They showed that partnership can replace indifference and distrust in city-citizens relations. However, Hampton's experience also shows that ideas alone cannot power partnerships. Material resources from the public-sector are essential in sustaining city-community collaboration. A revenue-starved public sector inspires little activity from the citizenry. Though much has been written recently about the importance of community and civil society, this "third" sector, standing by itself, manifests little vitality.

Hampton's human-capital agenda is instructive. This agenda grew out of the city's "reinvented" management approach that stressed administrative flexibility and opened the way to partnership with the citizenry. Capacity-building at the neighborhood level and among the city's youth were important steps. Hampton also shows that, even in circumstances of a weak revenue position, a city's leadership is able to take the kind of long-term view necessary to embrace a human-capital agenda. Hampton's weak revenue position, however, also shows how fragile a human-capital agenda can be. Although aligning the efforts of local government and community can generate some synergy, public resources have to exceed a threshold to sustain that synergy. In a city in which most citizens have modest incomes, the commercial base is relatively small, and "big time" philanthropy is unavailable, the role of the state government may assume added importance in encouraging or discouraging community engagement in a human-capital agenda.

Not to be overlooked, however, is the fact that despite an unfavorable revenue climate, Hampton's innovative agenda of the early 1990s has proved to be highly durable. The Neigborhood Office, the Coalition for Youth, HFP, IN-SYNC and a body of community and learning centers remain in place. And the city's close ally in youth

development, Alternatives, Inc, also continues to be a significant force. Although a broad community-development approach has not taken hold, neighborhood representation, community centers, after-school programs, early childhood education (though, as in most places, incomplete in coverage), and youth development are firmly established; they enjoy what is aptly called "an institutional legacy."[19] As Baumgartner and Jones have argued, an initial mobilization can change the institutional and policy landscape in ways that have a lasting impact.[20]

A constricted revenue situation has limited the scope of the city's human-capital agenda, but the institutional legacy is in place and can form new links. For example, Cindy Carlson holds membership on the Youth Committee of the area's recently established Workforce Development Board. And the early childhood spin-off of the Hampton Roads Partnership continues to work on a regional basis to promote early childhood initiatives.

Although it is not quite the case that Hampton could decide its own destiny, city leaders have made important direction-setting moves. In 1982, when James Eason ran for and was elected mayor, the city embarked on a path quite different from the one envisaged by his predecessor, Mayor Thomas Gear. Mayor Gear offered a scenario of minimum taxes and diminished services as a way of coping with economic decline. Eason and his administrative team, along with subsequent alliances that took shape, pursued a different course of activity, expanding services for children and youth and addressing neighborhood concerns.

When the 1990s gave way to a new century, a turn to economic development was in some sense a product of Hampton's constrained economic position. But it is also a matter of Wallace's leadership. Early in his career as an assistant city manager, Wallace was assigned to work in the area of economic development (always a significant concern of city officials), and that has remained a high priority of his. With a minority on the city council and others vigorously contesting Wallace's handling of development proposals, a different leadership could have taken a more modest approach. Hence, as the 2004 election shows, it was not predetermined that the agenda spotlight shift to economic development, but shift it did. The city's two BIDs (business improvement districts)

provide a ready connection with the commercial sector, as well as vocal advocates of business interests.

In writing about policy at the national level, John Kingdon has emphasized the importance of the different streams of problems, policy thinking, and the political process. He argues that agendas are set when these streams come together, and that their convergence is not a spontaneous process independent of human agency. Instead, he argues, entrepreneurs -- human actors bent on achieving policy purposes -- play a vital role. He also reminds us about "the importance of combination rather than single origins" (p. 206). Hence we should not assume that leadership figures are the sole explanation of what does or does not happen. Much is beyond their control. But, as intentional creatures acting together, people can bend circumstances "to their purposes to some degree."[21] (225).

Hampton bears out the soundness of Kingdon's observation. It mattered how key players saw the problems they faced, what they deemed to be appropriate responses, and what bundle of skills and resources they brought together. In Hampton's story of policy innovation, the central threads are about the purposes that a group of talented professionals came to share and how they linked their efforts to pursue them. Moreover, linkage was not restricted to the government sector. It included the nonprofit sector, business interests (although not through the usual chamber of commerce/downtown business association tie), and community leaders. The creation of Neighborhood College recognized the importance of aligning governmental and non-governmental forces and countering the distrust that often builds up in the citizen-government relationship. When the Eason/McNeill team assumed leadership of the city in the 1980s, they had no master plan of how to govern Hampton, but they had important insights and a significant skill base through which to put those insights into operation. They opened a window of opportunity for shaping a new agenda and created an institutional legacy that continues to be an important part of the governance of the city.

Notes

[1] Background reading led to a series of field visits, starting in summer of 1999. Interviews, usually in person but some by telephone, continued through 2004. Hampton is featured in *Banishing Bureaucracy: Five Strategies for Reinventing Government* by David Osborne and Peter Plastrik (1997, pp. 229-255), and also in article by the same authors, "A Lesson in Reinvention," *Governing* (February 1997), pp. 26-31. See also, David A. Plotz, "Hampton, Virginia - Comprehensive Plan Update," *Community Problem Solving Case Summaries*, Vol. III (Program for Community Problem Solving, 1992), pp. 35-38.

[2] We say "local" to distinguish our focus from that of studies concerned mainly with agenda setting at the national level, particularly work by John W. Kingdon , *Agendas, Alaternatives, and Public Policies*, 2nd ed. (Harper Collins 1995) and Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1993). We turn to a more general discussion in the conclusion.

[3] Cf. Paul Peterson, *City Limits* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[4] Cf. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. ch. 2.

[5] Osborne and Plastrik 1997; Plotz 1992.

[6] We take as a suitable cutoff point the city election of 2004, after which a new mayor and two new council members took office, constituting a new informal majority. It should be noted, however, the new mayor called for the abandonment of no significant initiatives but sounded as a theme that the city should once again focus on its neighborhoods (Terry Scanlon, "Power shift is 'informal alliance'" Hampton *Daily Press*, May 8 2004). This timing also coincides with the formation in the region of a new community organization, Empower Hampton Roads. It is multi-city and faith-based, and it is an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation (M. Wamble, ""So many issues, so little time for new faith-based group in area," Hampton *Daily Press*, May 23, 2004; see also "A new covenant for social change," *The Virginia Pilot,* May 20, 2004). In addition, a new school superintendent has been appointed, the first appointed from outside in a number of years.

[7] Plotz 1992.

[8] Quoted in Plotz 1992, p. 36.

[9] David Lerman, "Hampton mayor targets dropouts," Hampton *Times Herald*, 1-25-90.

[10] City of Hampton, Coalition for Youth, "Proposed Plan of Action," 1-27-93.

[11] Neighborhood Office, City of Hampton, "A History of Hampton's Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative," July 1998.

[12] Quoted in Plotz 1992, p. 37.

[13] "In-SYNC Partnerships" (internal document, 7-24-00).

[14] City of Hampton, Neighborhood Office, 1998.

[15] However, note that state-mandated testing and accountability for schools nudges the system away from alignment and reinforces the built-in tendency for schools to pursue their own functionally defined task. An elected school board may also reinforce the pull away from alignment.

[16] Plotz 1992, p.36.

[17] In the most recent superintendent search, the school board declined to appoint a search committee with community members, but instead confined itself to holding public hearings about the qualities desired in a new head for the school system. The search was then turned over to a "head hunter" organization, and the board made a selection from the candidates garnered through that process.

[18] Scanlon, 5-8-2004.

[19] B. Guy Peters and Brian W. Hogwood, "In Search of the Issue-Attention Cycle," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 47, pp. 238-253.

[20] *Agendas and Instability on American Politics*, pp. 87-88.

[21] *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, p. 225.