

“A Proxy War Over the City’s Identity”:  
Framing and Collective Action in the Takoma Junction Redevelopment

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## **Abstract**

Urban planning and development are often characterized by contentious, robust public debate, which can be organized by social movement organizations that frame problems and offer solutions. These frames vary in their degree of resonance and place incorporation, which predict the amount of collective action that can be generated. In the case of the Takoma Junction Redevelopment – a mixed-use site in a Washington, D.C. suburb – I hypothesize that one of the three organizations that mobilized supporters around the project, the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op, had frames with the highest degree of resonance and place incorporation, and, thus, generated the most collective action. Drawing from Benford and Snow's frame resonance (2000) and Martin's place-frames (2003), I determined each organization's resonance and place incorporation and coded hundreds of public comments to measure collective action. This research contributes to existing literature on the role of place and resonance in the framing process and can offer guidance on what makes an effective collective action frame.

## Introduction

The City of Takoma Park, Maryland – a nuclear-free suburb of about 18,000 outside of Washington, D.C. where non-U.S. citizens and sixteen-year-olds can vote in local elections – has long been known for its progressive activism (Zapana 2012). Recently, a prolonged fight over the redevelopment of a city-owned parcel of land has shown this activism is still alive. In 1995, the City of Takoma Park purchased a 1.2-acre surface parking lot at the intersection of Carroll and Ethan Allen Avenues, commonly known as Takoma Junction (Camilli 2017), with the intent of developing it at some point in the future. In 2015, the City issued a Request for Proposals to developers for a sustainable and aesthetic redevelopment project that would stimulate the local economy (City of Takoma Park 2019b). This project became known as the Takoma Junction Redevelopment (TJR). After fifteen months of deliberation, the Neighborhood Development Company (NDC) was selected from four finalists.

From the start, the TJR was a battle over conflicting visions of what Takoma Park was and should be, both physically and socially (Daddio and Camilli 2018). The NDC's initial proposal offered three stories of commercial, residential, and public space and sought to include the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op, which operates next to the proposed development and uses the existing surface parking lot. Some residents favored a private, mixed-use project; others favored a public project with public space for the community; and still others favored a 'no-build' decision or an expansion of the existing Co-op. Each group of residents would refer to the same values and concerns – operational issues, racial and economic diversity, and progressivity and sustainability – when making their case. As one local radio host described it, the redevelopment became a “proxy war over gentrification and the city's identity” (Nnamdi 2018).

This produced a robust and contentious public debate that was organized by the City Council and framed by three different groups. The NDC's proposal was supported by the Council and A Junction for All (AJFA), an informal group of residents who believed the proposal was progressive, sustainable, and would provide economic opportunity in line with the community's values. It was opposed by the Co-op and Community Vision for Takoma Junction (CVTJ), an informal group of residents who believed the proposal was not progressive enough, because it did not have enough public space or economic and racial diversity. As the Co-op entered negotiations with the NDC over their operational concerns, the City Council worked extensively to address the community's concerns, holding over fifty formal meetings, work sessions, or listening sessions from January 2014 to July 2018 (City of Takoma Park 2019b).

As the months passed, residents sorted themselves by group based on their opinions about the proposal and their perception of Takoma Park. This was shaped by understanding of their community as a place, or the meanings and values they attached with the physical city (Gieryn 2000). Each group developed collective action frames by framing the issue, or attaching generally-agreed-upon meanings and values to it (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000). These frames varied in their resonance and incorporation of place, two factors that should predict the amount of collective action generated (Benford and Snow 2000; Martin 2003).

Which group's frames were most resonant and incorporated place the most? Which group actually generated the most collective action? I hypothesized that the Co-op's frames were most resonant, given their location at the Junction and their business-customer relationship with much of the community. However, I hypothesized that AJFA's frames incorporated place the most, since they appeared to make the clearest connection between community values and the physical aspects of the proposal. Finally, I hypothesized that the Co-op's frames' cumulative resonance

and place incorporation outweighed that of the other two and, thus, should generate the most collective action.

After defining each groups' frames and determining their resonance and place incorporation, I analyzed over 425 written comments to the City Council to test my hypothesis. While there was little variation in the resonance and place incorporation of the three groups, the Co-op actually had the lowest cumulative score and CVTJ had the highest. I found that CVTJ and AJFA's frames were used in over twice as many comments as the Co-op's frames, offering support for the theoretical connection between resonance, place incorporation, and collective action. Further, place-based arguments were mainstays in a majority of the comments submitted.

Although it is unclear what effect these comments may have had on the City Council or the proposal's shape, it *is* clear that developing collective action frames with place and resonance in mind is beneficial to their ability to motivate members to participate in collective action. I hope that my research and conclusions can offer some guidance to groups as they frame issues and attempt to influence public opinion and impact public policy and urban development.

## **Literature Review**

When a community faces potential change, its members often respond by participating in collective action. This can be organized and motivated by social movement organizations through the creation and use of collective action frames. In urban planning and development cases, individual and community understandings of place can guide the framing process. A frame's effectiveness can be predicted by the degree to which it resonates and incorporates place.

## **The Concept of Place**

A place has a geographic location and physical form that are imbued with meaning and value (Gieryn 2000). A neighborhood, for example, can be considered a place because it has a physical, geographic location and a meaning that is continually constructed by those who interact with it. Often tied to urban planning, place is especially salient in urban areas. In the New Urbanism movement, city planning is guided by individual and community needs that are informed by understandings of place (Jacobs 1961). This type of planning is known as placemaking, or the creation of places that reflect a community's physical, cultural, and social identities and values (Project for Public Spaces 2018). Placemaking can be influenced by individual residents or local groups; the latter are known as social movement organizations.

## **Social Movement Organizations**

A social movement can be defined as a “collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in society” (Turner and Killian 1957, 308). While the term collectivity implies a fluid group with informal leadership, a movement can be formally organized through a social movement organization (SMO) (Turner and Killian 1957; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004). SMOs can be closely involved with and have significant influence on every part of the policymaking process, from agenda-setting to participative decision-making to policy implementation (Andrews and Edwards 2004). Key functions of an SMO include the framing of an issue, the mobilization of members, and the generation of collective action.

## **The Framing Process**

First developed by Erving Goffman in the 1970s, frame analysis explains the human organization and perception of events or experiences (Goffman 1974). David Snow and Robert Benford later developed the concept in social movement research, defining framing as the process by which the leaders of an SMO attach meaning to a set of conditions or events (Snow and Benford 1988). Framing produces collective action frames, which guide the action of the SMO's members (Benford and Snow 2000). An SMO's ability to actually affect collective action depends on its ability to affect consensus mobilization and action mobilization (Klandermans 1984), which is achieved through three core framing tasks: identifying a diagnosis, a proposed solution, and a call to action (Snow and Benford 1988). Thus, framing produces three collective action frames: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational.

Deborah Martin explicitly connects place to framing through place-frames, which define a place-based identity by drawing on shared experiences of place. These frames generally disregard residents' social differences (such ethnicity or class) and specifically illustrate "how the conditions of daily life – inherently spatial and geographically located – inform and underlie activist discourse" (Martin 2003, 747). In her research on St Paul, Minnesota neighborhood organizations, Martin identifies general place-frames that address broad neighborhood agendas and can influence outsider perception or be activated to respond to a problem (Martin 2003; Amenta and Caren 2004). Further research addressed the use of place-frames in response to specific problems, but the concept has not been widely adopted yet. Specifically, place-frames have been used to describe opposition to high-density housing in Toronto and the contested implementation of Clinton-era block grants in Southwest Georgia (Larsen 2004; Poppe and

Young 2015). This research suggests that the intentional incorporation of place into collective action frames yields more suitable and effective frames for place-based issues.

Of the three collective action frames, SMOs use diagnostic frames to identify and define a problem and its causes. They may assign blame to a certain factor or actor; this aids in directing action through the prognostic frame, which offers a solution to the problem. In cases where SMOs generally agree on the problem, they often differ in their prognostic frame (Benford and Snow 2000). Both frames include place implicitly and/or explicitly since the identified problem conflicts with the group's understanding of place (Martin 2003). Finally, SMOs must identify and frame a "rationale for action that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis" (Snow and Benford 1988, 202). This motivational frame is further connected to an individual's sense of place, which is highly personal and motivating (Martin 2003).

Frames are generated through discursive and contested processes (Benford and Snow 2000). In the discursive process, speech and text are used to articulate the problem and its connection with group value. Finally, the framing process is generally a contested one, since internal and external forces are interested in emphasizing their own values or goals and the organization may be coalition-based.

### **Frame Resonance**

Frames vary in their degree of resonance, which is determined by two factors: credibility and salience (Benford and Snow 2000). A frame's credibility is determined by its consistency, empirical credibility, and the SMO's credibility. Consistency refers to the "congruency between an SMO's articulated beliefs, claims, and actions" (Benford and Snow 2000, 620). Empirical credibility refers to the believability of the fit between the situation and its framing, not



necessarily its factual accuracy (although credible evidence plays an important role). SMO credibility refers to the perceived credibility of its articulators, as sources that are considered credible, attractive, and/or powerful are more persuasive (Hass 1981). Resonant frames have few contradictions, believable claims, and credible articulators.

A frame's salience is determined by its centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity (Benford and Snow 2000). Centrality refers to "how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with frames are to the lives" of its targets (Benford and Snow 2000, 621). Experiential commensurability refers to the abstractness of the frame in relation to an individual's daily life, while narrative fidelity refers to the frame's consistency with the group's experiences. Resonant frames are essential to individuals' lives and consistent with individual and group experiences.

Benford and Snow emphasize the hypothetical nature of the relationship between resonance and collective action. Some empirical research exists on the influence of individual resonance factors on the success of various frames, specifically credibility and narrative fidelity (see Benford and Snow 2000). However, little to no empirical research examines how the six resonance factors contribute to a frame's cumulative resonance, nor its relationship with the success of the frame at generating collective action.

## **Hypothesis**

The three social movement organizations involved in the Takoma Junction Redevelopment – the Takoma Park-Silver Spring co-op, Community Vision for Takoma Junction, and A Junction for All – developed and used diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational place-frames. These frames differ in their degree of resonance and the degree to which they

incorporate shared understandings of place. Theoretically, a frame with a higher degree of resonance and a greater incorporation of place will produce more collective action than a frame with a lower degree of resonance and a lesser incorporation of place. Which SMO's frames were most resonant and incorporated place the most? Which SMO actually generated the most collective action?

I hypothesize that the Co-op's frames were most resonant, since they are located at the Junction and have a personal business-customer relationship with their members. However, I hypothesize that A Junction for All's frames incorporated place the most, since they appear to make the clearest connection between community values and the physical aspects of the proposal. Overall, I hypothesize that the cumulative effect of the Co-op's frames' resonance and place incorporation outweighs that of the other two groups. Thus, I hypothesize that the Co-op generated the most collective action.

## **Study Design**

There are two parts to my first research question: (1) Which SMO's frames were most resonant?, and (2) Which SMO's frames incorporated place the most? To answer these, I began by describing each SMO and defining its three collective action frames: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. I used a representative sample of communications to its members, letters to city officials, and alternative plans (Martin 2003). Not all sources were available or applicable, but their sum was representative of each SMO's frames.

To measure the resonance of each SMO's frames, I created an index based on Benford and Snow's six factors of resonance, which were operationalized through one to two questions drawn from existing literature (Table 1). Based on these questions, I assigned each factor a value

between 0 and 2, where a higher value indicates that the frame satisfied that factor. This produced six individual values of resonance, which I summed to generate a resonance score for each SMO (range = 0-12). The SMO with the greatest resonance will theoretically generate the most collective action.

To measure the degree to which an SMO's frames incorporated place, I created an index of questions drawn from Martin's description of place-frames (Table 2). I assigned each question a value between 0 and 2, where a higher value indicates that the frame satisfactorily incorporated place. This produced four values, which I summed to generate a place incorporation score for each SMO (range = 0-8). The SMO with the highest place incorporation score will theoretically generate the most collective action.

<b>Table 1. Frame Resonance</b>	
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Frame Consistency	Are there contradictions among an SMO's beliefs and claims? Are there contradictions between an SMO's framings and actions?
Empirical Credibility	Can a frame's claims about a situation be verified? Are claims supported by evidence and believable to the SMO's members and/or the public?
SMO Credibility	Are the frame's articulators perceived as experts? Do the articulators hold a high status in their community?
Centrality	Are the frame's values central to its target individuals? How important is this project, in both its proposed and ideal form, to the individual?
Experiential Commensurability	Is the frame congruent and vital to the personal, daily experiences of its target individuals? How much will individuals be affected by this project, in both its proposed and ideal form?
Narrative Fidelity	Is the frame consistent to the group's experiences and cultural understandings?

<b>Table 2. Place Incorporation</b>
<b>Question: To what degree does the frame...</b>
...obscure the social differences (such as ethnicity or class) of residents?
...feature residents' daily life experiences?
...describe the physical condition of the Junction?
...emphasize a common interest or characteristic of residents?

Which SMO actually generated the most collective action? To answer my second research question, I quantified the collective action generated by each SMO through a content analysis. I specifically looked at written comments submitted electronically to the City Council. I operated under the assumption that if a commenter uses language representative of an SMO's frame, then their comment can be considered a product of that frame. I read 437 comments submitted electronically from April 4, 2018 to June 20, 2018 and coded them as outlined below (City of Takoma Park 2019a).

I coded each comment according to five general attributes (Table ). First, what is the commenter's opinion of both general development at Takoma Junction and the specific proposal? This is coded by support or opposition and includes whether they offer changes for the latter, since the proposal is the salient topic. Second, does the comment specifically address an SMO, the developer, and/or the city? This is coded by a simple yes-no; if yes, the specific group(s) is noted according to whether they are addressed favorably or unfavorably. Third, does the commenter write that they are a member of or shop at the Co-op? Fourth, is the commenter's language representative of an SMO's frame? This is coded by a simple yes-no; if yes, the specific SMO is noted. Fifth, are the comment's primary arguments concerned with place, details, or both? Arguments based on place emphasize values imbued in Takoma Park and the

Junction by its residents. Arguments based on details emphasize logistical or technical concerns with the proposal.

<b>Table 3. Coding Attributes and Possible Values.</b>		
<b>Group</b>	<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Possible Values</b>
1	OpinionDevelopment	Support, Oppose, Unclear
	OpinionProposal	Support, Support with Changes, Oppose with Changes, Oppose, Unclear
2	AddressGroup	Yes, No
	FavorableGroup	Co-Op, CVTJ, AJFA, NDC, City
	UnfavorableGroup	Co-Op, CVTJ, AJFA, NDC, City
3	CoopMember	Yes, Shopper, No
4	AFrame	Yes, No
	SMOFrame	Co-Op, CVTJ, AJFA
5	Reason	Place, Details, Both

After coding each comment, I used DB Browser for SQLite to run basic SQL queries on the dataset (Piacentini 2017). These were primarily *group by* commands to generate summary statistics or to clean the data and *where* commands using Boolean operators to test specific scenarios or combinations. Overall, I analyzed 426 of the 437 comments available. Of the 11 that were discarded, seven had attached remarks, two were duplicates, one was blank, and one addressed a different issue.

### **Defining Each Frame**

To code each comment, it was necessary to describe each SMO and define their collective action frames. These are summarized in Table 4.

## **Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op**

The Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op is a natural foods grocery store at the intersection of Carroll and Ethan Allen Avenues, commonly known as the Takoma Junction. As a cooperative business, the Co-op is owned by almost 10,000 members who receive shopping benefits and vote for the Board of Representatives and in various referendums (TPSS Co-op 2019b). The Co-op has operated at Takoma Junction since 1998 and in Takoma Park since 1981. They are the only SMO with a material stake in the TJR, since they submitted their own proposal and will be affected by any development, regardless of the developer or proposal.

Before the Co-op reached a cooperation agreement with the NDC in September 2018, they maintained two webpages that provided updates and correspondence. After mediation and a website redesign, the Co-op replaced this page with one that describes their lease and cooperation agreement with the NDC. To define the Co-op's frames, I primarily used archived versions of the 'Junction Development Project' page and the 'Takoma Junction Redevelopment' page (TPSS Co-op 2018a, 2018b), which included various correspondence to the City Council, the NDC, and their members.

In their diagnostic frame, the Co-op identifies a problem: the NDC's proposal does not benefit or incorporate the Co-op to the extent they would like. The Co-op submitted their own proposal in 2014 and was not selected as a finalist, but they have remained a part of the redevelopment process since they would be directly affected by any development. The Co-op specifically attributes blame to the NDC, whom they claim has failed to participate in substantive, good-faith discussions about the Co-op's concerns (TPSS Co-op 2018a). They attribute some blame to the City as well, whom they argue disregarded the stated project

objectives when selecting the NDC's proposal. The Co-op's public documents don't address the other two SMOs.

The Co-op's concerns with the NDC proposal are primarily logistical issues: decreased parking, an inadequate lay-by delivery lane, and waste storage and collection. These are described as needs "of utmost importance for the survival of the Co-op," and the Co-op states that they have "asked for no favors beyond the opportunity to stay in business." Further, they seek "development that would allow for our business needs and that is consistent with community values," but don't define what these values are (TPSS Co-op 2018a).

In their prognostic frame, the Co-op identifies a solution: the NDC will provide accommodations for the Co-op's operations and won't lease to other grocery stores. Earlier, the Co-op proposed an expansion into the new development but this was abandoned after they disagreed with the NDC over rent (Camilli 2017). The Co-op continues to focus on solving specific needs rather than fulfilling community values. Their call for collective action is focused on delaying all City Council votes until an agreement with the NDC is reached.

Interestingly, the Co-op recognizes that there are "different views amongst our members about the proposed development" and tries to avoid making their frames values-based by stating that they support development that "will allow the Co-op to thrive in this community we care so much about." (TPSS Co-op 2018b). In their motivational frame, the Co-op encourages members to speak up to save (and ideally expand and improve) their cooperative grocery store, focusing on the concrete consequences of the proposal.

## **Community Vision for Takoma Junction**

Community Vision for Takoma Junction (CVTJ) is a group of Takoma Park residents who are generally aligned with the Co-op and oppose the proposal. CVTJ was founded during the redevelopment process and they consider themselves an informal network. There is no formal process to join CVTJ and they do not list membership numbers, but their email list has over 1,000 names (Community Vision for Takoma Junction 2019). CVTJ maintains a website titled ‘Community Vision for Takoma.’ To define CVTJ’s frames, I primarily used their home, ‘FAQ,’ and ‘About’ pages (CVTJ 2019). CVTJ did offer an alternative plan, but they did not have formal correspondence with the City.

In their diagnostic frame, CVTJ identifies two major problems. First, the proposal would threaten the Co-op’s operations and survival. Second, the proposal is a developer-driven, non-inclusive project that would eliminate community space. In their prognostic frame, CVTJ identifies several requests, including inclusive public space, affordable retail space for local small businesses, and support for the Co-op. Two local designers drafted up an alternative plan that incorporates these requests (CVTJ 2019).

CVTJ focuses significantly more on community values than the Co-op or AJFA do, especially in their motivational frame. CVTJ still cites “Takoma Park’s values,” a purposefully vague phrase, but they also use phrases such as “public land for the public good” and emphasize racial and economic diversity, local entrepreneurship, and safety, all which are more concrete value statements. This separates CVTJ’s framing from the Co-op’s, since the Co-op focuses on logistical concerns and the impact on their members, instead of values-based concerns and the impact on the community.



## **A Junction for All**

A Junction for All (AJFA) is a group of Takoma Park residents who support the NDC's proposal as it currently exists. AJFA was founded by eleven key organizers during the early stages of the redevelopment process and it is unclear if these individuals were part of an informal group before the TJR began. AJFA is comprised of volunteers and is not affiliated with the NDC (A Junction for All 2019). There is no formal process to join AJFA and they do not list membership numbers. AJFA maintains a website titled 'A Junction for All.' Interestingly, the web address 'ajunction.com' redirects to CVTJ's website. To define AJFA's frames, I primarily used their home and 'FAQs' pages (AJFA 2019). AJFA did not have formal correspondence with the City, nor did they offer an alternative plan since they supported the NDC's proposal.

Since they are satisfied with the existing proposal, AJFA does not define a traditional problem or solution. Instead, AJFA frames opposition to and support of the NDC's proposal as their diagnosis and prognosis, respectively. Further, their motivational frame simply encourages their members to show support for the existing proposal by contacting their council members, submitting public comments, or attending meetings. These three frames are fairly basic and are anchored on a common set of values and vision for Takoma Junction.

AJFA and its members support the NDC's proposal because it includes local shopping, transit-oriented development, environmental sustainability, and public space, which are based on the values of "diversity, being green, arts, culture, and community" (AJFA 2019). They primarily frame the development as being progressive because it will be accessible to all residents, reduce carbon emissions, and "provide residents of color and poorer residents with greater economic opportunity" (AJFA 2019). AJFA recognizes the Co-op's logistical concerns and the importance of their survival, but they suggest the Co-op is asking for more than it deserves.

<b>Table 4. Summary of Each SMO's Frames.</b>	
Co-op	Diagnostic: Proposal does not benefit them. Prognostic: Proposal should accommodate their operations. Motivational: Save the Co-op and support development that is consistent with community values.
CVTJ	Diagnostic: Proposal threatens the Co-op and is developer-driven and non-inclusive. Prognostic: Proposal should support the Co-op and include inclusive public spaces. Motivational: Follow community values of racial and economic diversity and local entrepreneurship.
AJFA	Diagnostic: Proposal is satisfactory and consistent with community values. Prognostic: Proposal should be approved as is. Motivational: Support the proposal since it is progressive, sustainable, and will provide economic opportunity.

### **Measuring Resonance and Place Incorporation**

I determined resonance and place incorporation scores for the three SMOs using the indexes (Tables 1 and 2) defined in my study design. I primarily used the frames defined above to answer the questions in each index. These scores are summarized in Tables 5 and 6.

### **Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op**

The Co-op is unique since they are a key local business with a large existing base of casual and devoted members, while CVTJ and AJFA are smaller, organic, neighborhood-level organizations. They have served Takoma Park for almost four decades, touching the lives of essentially everyone in some way and even influencing where some decide to live. Further, they are perceived as experts since they know what their business operations require. Thus, the Co-op's frame articulators – the project manager, general manager, and board of representatives – are seen as highly credible.

The Co-op's frame consistency is mixed, given the tensions between them, the NDC, and the City. The Co-op presents themselves as a 'good guy' who is acting in good faith but

receiving the short end of the stick in their negotiations. They make claims about what happened in the negotiations, but these are countered by claims from AJFA that the Co-op didn't negotiate in good faith or demanded more than was reasonable (TPSS Co-op 2018a; Camilli 2017). That contradiction between the Co-op's claims, AJFA's claims, and the evidence provided demonstrates weak frame consistency, but the presence of evidence does strengthen their empirical credibility (which is less concerned with the validity of the claims). The Co-op maintained a nearly comprehensive online record of their involvement in the TJR and referenced several technical studies, along with their own operational requirements, when making claims about the specifics of the proposal.

The Co-op is positioned to score highly in salience since they are an important part of many households' daily lives, but they tended to fall short. The Co-op's frames are not very central to their members' lives, since they focus heavily on technical arguments instead of values-based ones. However, the TJR *is* highly important to their members and their motivational frame does emphasize that, since development will impact the store in some way. The frames' experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity operate similarly, since the Co-op's framing leans on technical details rather than values-based claims. While debating lay-by lane length or waste storage location increases empirical credibility and offers a way for the most concerned members to engage, it doesn't address the individual and group experiences that their members have. The Co-op makes claims about the survival and well-being of their store in the motivational frame, but they fail to make a strong connection between their framing and individual and group experiences. Overall, the Co-op scores 8 out of 12 in resonance.

The Co-op incorporates place differently than CVTJ and AJFA, since their framing is almost entirely concerned with the physical conditions of the proposal, rather than the meanings

and values associated with them. This allows them to easily obscure social differences among residents, as their audience is an inclusive group of members and shoppers. However, some note that this group excludes socioeconomically disadvantaged residents, since the Co-op is more expensive than a traditional grocery store.

The Co-op should be successful at emphasizing daily life experiences and a universal interest since many of their members shop daily or weekly and have a common interest in maintaining the Co-op's existence. However, their framing is solely focused on the viability of the store, other than a handful of general sentences about seeking "development that is consistent with community values" (TPSS Co-op 2018a). They don't address residents' experience at Takoma Junction beyond shopping at the Co-op, nor do they make a case for a common interest for the Takoma Park community as a whole. It isn't as important that the frame appeals to a broader audience since it is directed at generating collective action from concerned members, but it discounts those who support both the Co-op as an institution and the current proposal. Overall, the Co-op scores 6 out of 8 in place incorporation.

### **Community Vision for Takoma Park**

CVTJ maximizes their resonance by taking the empirical aspects of the Co-op's framing and adding values-based arguments. CVTJ avoids some of the frame consistency issues that the Co-op experienced since they do not make claims about their involvement in the TJR. They echo the Co-op's claims about the negotiations and some residents noted that CVTJ misrepresented themselves while petitioning, which weakens their frame consistency. This is balanced by values-based claims that hold up to scrutiny, since preserving the Co-op and limiting commercial development is consistent with the values of local entrepreneurship and economic diversity.

CVTJ addresses the specific details of the proposal and uses technical studies as support, which contributes to a solid empirical credibility that is further strengthened by the local experts who support CVTJ, including an architect who drew up an alternative plan for the Junction (CVTJ 2019). These community members increase CVTJ's own credibility, since they are perceived as experts. CVTJ's credibility is limited by its leaders, however, who are regular residents who are unusually concerned about the TJR. Without being a member of the Takoma Park community, however, it is hard to determine how credible CVTJ's leaders are seen as.

CVTJ avoids the Co-op's struggle with frame salience by using explicitly values-based arguments in their framing. Takoma Park prides itself as a progressive, diverse community and its residents value racial and economic diversity, local independent businesses, and a vibrant community. Since CVTJ argues that an alternative proposal is necessary to uphold these values, they make the case that this issue is central to residents' lives and the cultural understandings of the community, thus contributing to strong centrality and narrative fidelity. Like the Co-op, however, CVTJ's frames have weak experiential commensurability because they don't make a clear connection between individuals' everyday lives and the potential consequences of redevelopment. They echo the Co-op's message about the survival and well-being of the store and address pedestrian safety, but their framing feels distant from what life in the Junction would be like. Overall, CVTJ scores 9 out of 12 in resonance.

CVTJ's framing is significantly more place-centric. They consistently address the physical details of the proposal and how they may impact the Co-op's operations, but they also go beyond those concerns and describe pedestrian safety and traffic concerns, which are influential in creating a sense of 'place.' CVTJ does emphasize social differences such as Takoma Park's racial and economic diversity, but this happens at a community-wide level

instead of an individual one. Rather than framing these differences in a negative light or as a division in the community, CVTJ uses them to define a universal, common interest: maintaining their “identity as a racially and economically mixed City” (CVTJ 2019). CVTJ addresses other shared interests, such as opportunities for locally-owned businesses and environmental benefits, that further set them apart from the Co-op.

However, CVTJ’s frames don’t address residents’ daily life experiences. They write about pedestrian safety and local businesses as vague goals or buzzwords, rather than as part of a narrative about daily life. Without a clear story about what life could be like at the Junction, their members may struggle to make the connection between broad values and their daily experiences. Overall, CVTJ scores 7 out of 8 in place incorporation.

### **A Junction for All**

AJFA starts off at a disadvantage. Even though they are trying to move development forward, they are still maintaining the status quo by supporting the existing proposal. AJFA can’t critique the details of a proposal they support, which weakens their empirical credibility. They use details from the proposal as evidence instead, which may or may not be credible to the public. AJFA does respond to opposing claims about the TJR by using documents and reports from the City and local experts, which does strengthen their empirical credibility.

AJFA makes some claims about the Co-op’s involvement in the TJR, specifically addressing the lack of good faith negotiations and the refusal to accept appropriate concessions (AJFA 2019). They support these claims with evidence, which is countered by the Co-op’s claims. Like the Co-op, the contradictions between their claims and the evidence weakens their frame’s consistency. However, this is countered by values-based claims that are consistent with

the story that AJFA tells about the development. AJFA's credibility as an SMO is strengthened by the support of local experts, but their leaders are still just regular residents. Again, it is hard to determine how credible their leaders are seen as without being a member of the community.

AJFA uses essentially the same values as CVTJ, but with a different justification to fit the frame and their position on the proposal. AJFA uses Takoma Park's aforementioned identity as a progressive, diverse community to support its claim that the proposal is progressive. They stress local business, environmental sustainability, and inclusive public space, stating that the current proposal satisfies these values. Like CVTJ, these values-based claims lead to strong centrality and narrative fidelity. AJFA establishes experiential commensurability as well by specifically addressing the positive experiences that residents will have if the development happens as proposed: "This is an opportunity to have more places to run errands, break bread, share meals, and bump into each other" (AJFA 2019). Overall, AJFA scores 9 out of 12 in resonance.

AJFA and CVTJ use place similarly, with AJFA arguing that the sense of place will be met by the current proposal. AJFA emphasizes environmental sustainability and economic viability and uses diversity as a common interest. Their language is more direct ("provide residents of color and poorer residents with greater economic opportunity"), but in the context of Takoma Park's values that language does not negatively highlight social differences among residents (AJFA 2019). AJFA does address the physical conditions of the junction, even if they do not focus on the specific as much as CVTJ or the Co-op. AJFA counters claims about lay-by lanes and the appearance of the new structure and specifically mentions the inclusion of green space and the environmental impact of the new building. However, only modest evidence backs up these claims, which are often turn into philosophical arguments about sustainability and bad-faith negotiations by the Co-op. Overall, AJFA scores 7 out of 8 in place incorporation.

<b>Table 5. Summary of Resonance Scores.</b>			
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Co-op</b>	<b>CVTJ</b>	<b>AJFA</b>
Frame Consistency	1	1	1
Empirical Credibility	2	2	1
SMO Credibility	2	1	1
Centrality	1	2	2
Experiential Commensurability	1	1	2
Narrative Fidelity	1	2	2
<b>Total (max: 12)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>

<b>Table 6. Summary of Place Incorporation Scores.</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>Co-op</b>	<b>CVTJ</b>	<b>AJFA</b>
Obscures social differences	2	2	2
Features daily experiences	1	1	1
Describes physical conditions	2	2	1
Emphasizes common interests	1	2	2
<b>Total (max: 8)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>

## Results

Hundreds of concerned residents submitted a total of 426 comments over a 77-day period. Over 70% of comments were submitted by residents from Wards 1, 2, or 3 in Takoma Park; Takoma Junction is in the center of Ward 2 and is within an eighth of a mile of both Wards 1 and 3. Only 7% of comments were submitted by residents from Wards 4, 5, or 6, or non-residents, while the remaining 20% of comments were unable to be classified by ward (removing non-residents from the data set did not meaningfully impact the results). Only 17% of commenters specifically identified themselves as a member of or shopper at the Co-op.



Over three quarters of comments clearly supported some form of development at Takoma Junction, with only 3% opposed. Opinions on the NDC's proposal were mixed, with 41% clearly in support and 33% clearly in opposition. Some individuals supported (11%) or opposed (4%) the proposal with caveats or changes. Four out of every ten comments specifically addressed at least one of the five groups in the TJR: the three SMOs, the NDC, and the City (Table 7).

Only 41% of comments used one of the three frames as defined. Of this subsection of comments, 18% used the Co-op's framing, 40% used CVTJ's framing, and 42% used AJFA's framing. Most comments included a reason(s) for their support or opposition of the TJR; 46% used a primarily place-based argument, 27% used a primarily details-based argument, and 13% used an argument that utilized place and details equally.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>	<b>Total</b>
Co-op	19.7% (84)	9.8% (42)	<b>29.5% (126)</b>
CVTJ	2.1% (9)	1.4% (6)	<b>3.5% (15)</b>
AJFA	0.5% (2)	0% (0)	<b>0.5% (2)</b>
NDC	2.6% (11)	7.3% (31)	<b>9.8% (42)</b>
City	3.8% (16)	5.6% (24)	<b>9.4% (40)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.6% (122)</b>	<b>24.2% (103)</b>	<b>52.8% (225)</b>

There was little variation in the resonance and place incorporation scores for the three SMOs. Each SMO scored between 8 and 9 in resonance and between 6 and 7 in place incorporation. CVTJ had the highest resonance (tied) and place incorporation scores, while the Co-op had the lowest resonance and place incorporation (tied) scores. After standardizing both scores on a 10-point scale and adding them together, CVTJ had the highest combined score

(16.25 out of 20), AJFA had the second highest combined score (15.00), and the Co-op had the third highest score (14.17).

### **Analysis and Findings**

After defining each SMO's frames and determining their resonance and place incorporation scores, I found that the Co-op's frames had the lowest resonance and AJFA's frames incorporated place the least. Both results refuted my hypotheses that these two SMOs would have the highest respective scores. In fact, the Co-op had the lowest combined score of the three SMOs, when I hypothesized that it would have the highest.

I found little variation between the SMOs in both resonance and place incorporation, as each were within one point of each other for both individuals scores and within just over two points of each other for the standardized, combined score (a difference of just 10%). However, there was significant variation between the two dimensions of resonance: frame credibility and relative salience. All three SMOs had similar overall resonance scores, but each got there in a different way; the Co-op had strong credibility but weak salience, AJFA had strong salience but weak credibility, and CVTJ had equal amounts of both.

The Co-op's frames had greater credibility because they were built on concrete, fact-based arguments about the store's operations at Takoma Junction. CVTJ was able to use these arguments to their benefit as well, since they were closely aligned with the Co-op. AJFA's framing relied heavily on values- and place-based claims, which it struggled to back up with hard, credible evidence. On the other hand, AJFA's claims were highly salient for their audience, since they focused on community values and more personal arguments. The Co-op's focus on the technical shortcomings of the proposal backfired in this case, as they failed to appeal to

individual and community understandings of place. CVTJ, similar to AJFA, constructed a much more effective narrative since they adopted a community-wide angle to the TJR, resulting in a balanced framing that allowed them to take the highest combined score.

Based on the combined score, CVTJ should be expected to generate the most collective action, or the greatest number of comments using a defined frame, followed by AJFA and the Co-op. CVTJ and AJFA actually generated an almost identical number of comments, with 70 and 74 apiece. The Co-op lagged far behind, generating 55% fewer comments than the others. That result may be explained by frame salience, where CVTJ and AJFA were two and three points more salient than the Co-op, respectively. This suggests that salience is more important than credibility in generating collective action, which makes sense when taken at face value; many of us would agree that it is easier to make a connection with someone based on their values, rather than their opinions about technical measurements. Only the most dedicated members of an SMO would have the time or interest to care significantly about these details.

This seems to be the root of the Co-op's struggle to generate collective action. They had to focus on the details in the internal negotiations over the proposal, but couldn't look past them when framing the issue to garner support from their members and the broader community. Further, I would guess that many Takoma Park residents already had an opinion about the proposal (or at least what they imagined the Junction could or should be). It would be easier to motivate them to comment with a frame that emphasizes values that one stands for, rather than details that try to convince one what is right and wrong.

These conclusions are generally backed up by the arguments that individuals used in their comments (Table 8). Over 45% of all comments submitted used primarily place-based arguments, which is over 40% more than those that used primarily details-based arguments.

Comments that used one of the three frames were dominated by place-based arguments, while comments that didn't use a defined frame were more evenly split among place- and details-based arguments. Those making details-based arguments frequently referenced traffic patterns and a proposed traffic study, which none of the three SMOs adopted into their framing. As expected, AJFA's comments were dominated by place-based arguments while CVTJ's were more evenly split. The Co-op had primarily details-based comments, but the presence of a strong minority of place-based comments indicates that their audience was concerned about more than just their operations.

<b>Category of Comments</b>	<b>Raw #</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Both</b>
All comments	426	45.8% (195)	26.8% (114)	13.4% (57)
Using a defined frame	176	62.5% (110)	16.5% (29)	19.9% (35)
Not using a defined frame	250	34.0% (85)	32.8% (82)	8.8% (22)
Using the Co-op's frame	32	34.4% (11)	53.1% (17)	12.5% (4)
Using CVTJ's frame	70	42.8% (30)	15.7% (11)	38.6% (27)
Using AJFA's frame	74	93.2% (69)	1.3% (1)	5.4% (4)
Supporting the proposal	221	57.5% (127)	14.0% (31)	7.7% (17)
Opposing the proposal	157	38.2% (60)	32.5% (51)	23.6% (37)

### **Comment-Level Findings**

While reading through the comments, there were a number of phrases or ideas that didn't fit neatly into my coding scheme but added nuance to my results. There was a noticeable divide between the Co-op's members, who were split almost equally among the three SMOs. Most shoppers spoke positively about the Co-op itself, calling it a "mainstay" that "reflects our city's

values and contributes to our community.” But others wrote that the Co-op is a “place of privilege” that is “holding our community hostage.” This discontent stemmed from two sources: those who supported development at the expense of the Co-op (or believed it would be mutually beneficial) and/or those who disagreed with the Co-op’s tactics. One resident wrote that “while I am a member and shop there regularly, the Co-op, as a private business, should not be permitted under any circumstances to block or impede the necessary development of City property in the interest of City residents.” Other residents made claims about the Co-op’s strategy, writing that they had waged a “false information campaign” or were having a “ceaseless temper tantrum.”

Other comments specifically referenced efforts by SMOs to generate collective action for or against the TJR. A group of Ward 2 residents wrote to tell the Council that “we know that Community Vision will submit a large package of anti-site plan petition signatures, and we want you to know they were gathered in dishonesty,” while another wrote that “their petition has less than 300 signatures, despite paying for ads on Facebook and Twitter.” Some residents described how they “have been disheartened by the divisiveness” and that “those who oppose the project have been so vocal that I am practically afraid to show my support publicly.” In some cases, this motivated residents to show their support for the opposing side. One Ward 3 resident wrote: “I’m writing because I see that the Co-op is again soliciting their members to contact you to voice concerns. I would like to reiterate my strong support.”

It is important to remember the subsection of residents who may have strongly agreed with a frame but didn’t submit a written comment, even though the salient aspect of the frame is its ability to generate collective action. One resident wrote: “This community is not divided over this development – you’re just hearing from the most vocal group that opposes it ... Please remember the silent majority of residents who haven’t come here on behalf of the Co-op [who

are] too busy helping their kids with homework or working a second job.” Others echoed this sentiment, commenting that “while the angry are always the most vocal, they are rarely the most plentiful” and that “the voices against this proposal are loud, but many of us quieter voices care deeply too.”

Of the primarily place-based comments, a majority addressed place implicitly through values-based claims or descriptions of their community is or should be. Residents wrote that Takoma Park should “live up to its oft-professed values” and that the proposal shouldn’t “threaten the special character of the area.” Interestingly, several comments compared Takoma Park to Bethesda or Silver Spring, arguing that choosing the wrong proposal would turn their small, unique community into an “over-developed, corporatized” shell of its former self. A handful of comments did address place or other urbanist principles explicitly, generally through references to NIMBYism (Not In My BackYard) or gentrification. Several brought up placemaking as a model for what the TJR process should have looked like and one resident even referred to Jane Jacobs’ *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*, a critique of 1950s urban planning and a seminal text in the placemaking community.

Finally, I coded about 30 form comments (7.5% of total comments) that appeared to be directed by AJFA. I could not find a copy of the form comment online or a call for comments, but almost two-thirds were submitted within two or three days of each other and the language and content is essentially identical to AFJA’s frame. Most residents submitted the comment as is, but a few added their own thoughts within it. Both the Co-op and CVTJ provided general talking points, but neither provided a similar form comment.

## Limitations

My research was primarily limited by its scope and design. First, I was limited by the data available to analyze. I studied a short, discrete period of time when Takoma Park residents could submit written comments about the TJR. I didn't study other collective action that happened concurrently (such as comments at council meetings, social media or blog posts, and petitions). This made my analysis more manageable, but the relatively small sample size limits the strength of the conclusions I draw.

Conducting this research near the end of the policymaking process may have influenced my analysis as well. I don't believe it directly impacted my coding or analysis, since I was not concerned with the actual impact of collective action on final outcome. However, I defined each SMOs' frames and determined their resonance and place incorporation with knowledge of the entire TJR process. I defined the frames before coding each comment and I determined the two scores before looking at the results of my coding, but my own hypotheses and preconceptions about the SMOs and the TJR could have influenced the completion of those steps. Further, I may not have accurately captured the frames' composition during the discrete two-month period of public commenting.

I noticed several shortcomings in my methodology as well. Overall, I was satisfied with the detailedness of my frames and the comprehensiveness of the attributes I coded by. However, there were several instances where the coding scheme lacked the nuance necessary to differentiate between two similar yet distinct comments. For example, I had to refine what a favorable mention of an SMO looked like, since many residents referenced the Co-op casually.

Finally, there were some challenges in how I measured collective action and came to meaningful conclusions. First, a majority of comments were submitted by individual residents,

but a smaller portion were submitted by couples or small groups of neighbors. I decided to weigh all comments equally, as the emphasis was specifically on the generation of collective action. Second, the Co-op and AJFA had unique characteristics themselves. As addressed earlier, the Co-op isn't truly an SMO; it is a business with a commercial stake in the TJR. It has a dedicated clientele that can be easily reached and turned into a built-in member base that tacitly supports the Co-op's position. AJFA, on the other hand, is disadvantaged because their supporters are arguing *for* something and aren't critiquing or opposing the proposal, which tends to be a motivator. Residents may feel there is less need to voice their opinion for a proposal that appears to already have wide support.

### **Future Research**

I would approach future research from two main directions. First, I would test the same hypothesis – that frames with greater resonance and incorporation of place are better at generating collective action – on similar redevelopment cases, accounting for the limitations I addressed above and trying to differentiate between resonance and place. Finally, I would specifically look for cases where the community was more progressive, moderate, or conservative and/or where the project itself is traditionally seen as a negative or positive (low-income, high-density housing versus a community shopping center, for example).

Second, I would study the Takoma Junction Redevelopment case in greater depth, addressing the limitations I identified earlier and examining the effect that collective action had on the City Council and the shape of proposal. There are other salient parts of this case that are worthy of research, including how the three SMOs interacted with each other and the community and who impacted how the policymaking process unfolded. From an urban planning perspective,



the various proposals' specifics may be salient as well. Finally, I would expand my methodology from a content analysis to include oral interviews and policy analysis.

## **Conclusion**

On July 25, 2018, just weeks after the commenting period closed, the City Council voted to approve a resolution authorizing the NDC to submit their final site plan to the Montgomery County Planning Department. Following extensive mediation, the NDC reached a cooperation agreement with the Co-op that addressed their concerns and ended their opposition to the TJR (TPSS Co-op 2019a). As of this spring, the city anticipates that the site plan will be approved in mid-2019, permits will be issued in mid-2020, and construction will be complete by September 2021 (City of Takoma Park 2019b). Based on the sample of comments I studied, it is hard to determine what impact public opinion had, if any, on the Council's final decision. It is unlikely that the comments had a significant impact, as the proposal already had broad, sustained support from the Council and the public remained relatively split, 52% in favor and 37% opposed. I hesitate to ascribe this result to a single group, but in the end, A Junction for All appears to be the clear winner with the Co-op taking their own concessions as well.

What *is* clear is the connection between frame resonance, place incorporation, and collective action. I initially hypothesized that the Co-op's frames would be most effective at generating collective action given their cumulative resonance and place incorporation. This was quickly disproven by my empirical measurement, which found that CVTJ's frames had the highest cumulative degree of resonance and place incorporation instead, with the Co-op lagging behind in last place. However, I did find strong support for the hypothesis that frames with high degrees of resonance and place incorporation generate more collective action, as CVTJ and

AJFA's frames were used in over twice as many comments as the Co-op's frames. Further, place-based arguments were present in almost 60% of comments, including 45% that only used place-based reasoning. Assuming that individuals write comments that are indicative of what motivated them to comment, this suggests that place-based reasons are more effective drivers of collective action than details-based arguments.

However, it is important to remember that only 41% of comments used a frame that was clearly identifiable as that of the Co-op, CVTJ, or AJFA. This is lower than I expected and suggests that the SMOs' framing and messaging was not as widespread or persuasive as it appeared. While the Co-op was mentioned in over a third of all comments, their framing lacked a salience and connection with individuals' everyday lives that made them the least effective at generating collective action. CVTJ, on the other hand, was able to combine credibility, salience, and strong place incorporation to produce more than twice the amount of collective action as the Co-op. This was on par with AJFA, which had similarly strong frames but lacked empirical credibility, suggesting that salience and place may drive collective action more than details.

Ultimately, it appears that this collective action had a negligible impact on the final shape of the NDC's proposal, as SMOs entered the process too late to have a meaningful impact. However, that is not to suggest that framing an urban development issue and generating collective action isn't a valuable, productive way to express public sentiment. Collective action and public opinion may have a meaningful impact on outcomes, depending on how the policymaking process is structured. In those cases, SMOs should seriously consider the six factors of frame resonance and how they incorporate place when building collective action frames, as this research suggests they are strong indicators of a group's success at generating collective action.

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