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CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL TENSIONS: MOVING FORWARD WITH PUBLIC SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this chapter is to identify historical social tensions surrounding tideflats/port area development and activities. Our primary objective has been to bring the most prominent social tensions to the fore so that port decision makers can respond to them and, in doing so, gain the support of more and different community stakeholders. Without addressing these tensions, they are likely to continue to resurface. The key findings we present emerged out of a qualitative research approach, in which we applied the grounded theory method. We sifted through more than 500 pages of public comments related to tideflats/port area development and activities. We sorted comments based on common phrasing and meaning, and applied a coding system to reveal three key tensions: seeking just transitions, finding real trade-offs, and who gets to decide?

INTRODUCTION

Historical social tensions – what does this refer to? Tension occurs when something is stretched, either physically or emotionally. Imagine for a moment that historical social tension resembles a rubber band: when the rubber band is loose, the historical tension causes no harm, yet it remains present; when the band is stretched, it tightens and if the tightening continues it will snap. Social tensions are the result of combined economic and social histories which have come to influence the structural circumstances we experience today. Social tensions surrounding the tideflats of Tacoma are related to place attachment and involve experiences of residents of Tacoma, members of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, and people from other cities throughout Pierce County and the Puget Sound region.

Planning research shows that sustainable urban development involves conflict (Campbell 1996). The stories and voices that are not visible become marginalized in planning decisions (Sandercock 1998); the drive for regional smart growth and urban redevelopment creates environmental burdens, and benefits only some (Bullard 2007). These tensions surface in the public comments related to the Tideflats Interim Regulations.

Since the Port of Tacoma was created as a public port authority by Pierce County voters in 1918, tideflats development and port activities have elicited both support and resistance from

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community stakeholders. The purpose of the qualitative research presented in this chapter is to identify historical social tensions and conflicts tied to Tacoma's tideflats/port area. How are different, often competing priorities expressed? What tradeoffs provoke strong emotions? What historical changes and transitions do people recall? And, most importantly, who makes decisions for tideflats development and activities?

By revealing social tensions, we illuminate causes of social distrust, hostility, and opposition to development and business practices carried out in the tideflats today. Shedding light on discrepancies between Port of Tacoma plans and the visions of residents creates opportunities to forge new paths ahead, informed by the voices of more and different community stakeholders. Thus, this research is part of creating a bridge between those who have historically held power to make decisions and those who have been excluded from agenda setting and decision making processes.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

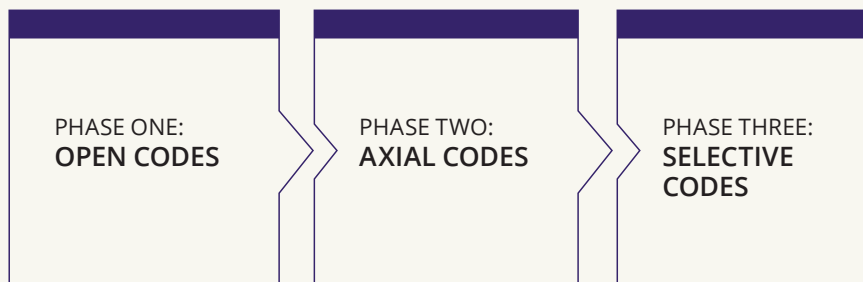
Our research involved sifting through qualitative data related to the Tideflats/Port Interim Regulations. We found that primary concerns related to tideflats development center around economic, environmental, and social circumstances, as well as relationships between those with decision making authority and members of the public. Local residents, community groups, members of the Puyallup Tribe, local environmental organizations, and others who live elsewhere in Pierce County and the broader Puget Sound region have given voice to a myriad of concerns and priorities.

We began with a review of archives maintained by the Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room. We reviewed newspaper clippings stored in files and organized by year. We applied the grounded theory method, which "requires us to stop and ask analytic questions of the data we have gathered" (Charmaz, 2014, p.109). This method enables one to discover social patterns and structures via collection, comparison, and sorting of qualitative data. It allowed us to identify the genuine attitudes of larger cross sections of the population and to appreciate social tensions. In this process, we applied coding to

categorize segments of our data by short name linked to broader themes. In doing so, we were able to summarize and account for each piece of data we observed.

Prior to applying the grounded theory method, we formed an overarching research question informed by our archival research: What tensions and conflicts revolve around tideflats development and activities? We considered three sub-questions: Are different competing priorities expressed? What standoffs and tradeoffs provoke strong emotions? Which historical changes or transitions do people mention? After formulating this set of questions, we sifted through 500 pages of public comments. We selected, sorted, and highlighted comments, text, and quotes which helped us answer our research questions and we developed open codes. We compared and related open codes to one another to create axial codes. Ultimately, we created selective codes, or themes, which enable us to present a set of findings related to our research questions. The visual representation below shows the progression of our coding process.

GROUNDED THEORY PROCESS



RESEARCH OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

The following table presents examples of the open codes we created for the public comments we reviewed. We sorted and categorized quotes based on key repeated words. We grouped open codes with similar meaning to create axial codes. We used the software program Nvivo to automatically code words. This minimized the time required to do the work and maximized the results.

OPEN CODES FROM PUBLIC COMMENTS

GROUNDED THEORY CODING - OPEN CODES	PUBLIC COMMENTS
Changes and transitions	"Tacoma has been burned before by waiting to put interim regulations in place, and it could certainly happen again"
Balancing different goals	"Pausing fossil fuels now is essential not only for Tacoma's protection in the short term, but also for a high-quality subarea plan"
Past pollution, past wrongs	"Recovering from 100 years of polluting the Port/Tide flats and Commencement Bay areas"
Short term versus long term	"We want decent paying jobs that are good for workers and good for the environment"
Social responsibility, contested definitions	"Tacoma is at a crossroads, and we need to ask some difficult and important questions about our collective future"
Priorities and goals	"Tacoma citizens and I want a cleaner and sustainable future where the inherent value of the environment is recognized protected and leveraged"
Strong emotions	"Tacoma cannot wait to take action"
Discouraging future pollution production	"Interim regulations need to pause proposals before any new ones can be made and grandfathered in"

TRANSFORMATION OF OPEN CODES INTO SELECTIVE CODES

OPEN CODES	AXIAL CODE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term versus long term goals • Current and ongoing vulnerability of the Tideflats • Concern over lack of jobs • Renewable energy versus fossil fuel • New vision for Tacoma versus old past 	<p>short term vs. long term</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern with health and safety • Presence of environmental injustice, need for environmental justice • Presence of past pollutions versus what is next • Need for a new clean industry for Tacoma • Contested legitimacy of regulations, accountability 	<p>environmental injustice</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First People’s right to be at the planning table • What does it mean to be socially responsible • Need for community involved planning • Need for improved communication strategy • Anger, protest about fossil fuel 	<p>social responsibility, contested definition</p>

STUDY RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

The final, selective codes indicate our key findings. Reading through 500+ pages of public comments three times assisted us in obtaining a clear sense of public concerns, opinions, ideas, and solutions. Our qualitative research analysis produced three key findings, or selective codes (themes):

- 1) Seeking just transitions
- 2) Facing real trade-offs
- 3) Who gets to decide?

The table below presents evidence from our qualitative analysis for each key finding.

THREE KEY THEMES REVEAL SOCIAL TENSIONS

SEEKING JUST TRANSITIONS	FACING REAL TRADE-OFFS	WHO GETS TO DECIDE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of jobs • Short term vs. long term • Presence of past pollution vs. what's next 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental injustice • Health and safety • Legitimacy of regulations and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social responsibility, contested definition • Anger about fossil fuels • Inclusive planning

SEEKING JUST TRANSITIONS

This theme answers our first research question: How are different competing priorities expressed? **About 40% of the comments spoke to the need to create a new vision for the Port of Tacoma, one that involves transitioning away from fossil fuel-based industries and toward renewable industries.** Many asked decision makers to focus on long term gains over short term profits. Some pointed out that “jobs in the renewable energy fields are already outpacing jobs in fossil fuel industries.” Others expressed the need to prioritize maintaining living wage jobs, still tied to

industry: “...jobs that are decent paying and good for workers and the environment.”

Those who recall the “aroma of Tacoma,” and who participate in ongoing efforts to cleanup and restore the tidflats connect dirty industries of the port with their perceptions of the port. These people are ready for a new reality and know it depends on port practices changing. Many people expressed the need to create “environmentally sustainable industries that produce large numbers of middle class jobs.”

FACING REAL TRADE-OFFS

This theme answers our second research question: What standoffs and tradeoffs provoke strong emotions? This theme revolves around deep-seated, emotionally-charged comments related to the effects of pollution on current public health and safety. These comments underscore questions about environmental justice and the need for greater accountability. Historically, pollution produced by port industries have burdened people who live in proximity of the port. Many of these residents beg officials to “value clean air and water over money.” Many stated that they “can still taste that pervasive and disgusting aroma of Tacoma,” and that they are “thankful for the actions finally taken by good folks like you to remedy the problem.”

When we choose to do one thing, it often means that we cannot do another thing; this gets at the need to find trade-offs. If we regulate pollution, we limit industrial practices. If we support any/all industrial development, we fail to protect the health and safety of community members. Some people must give a little, so that more people benefit. This theme captured about 31% of all comments, with many people urging officials to adopt regulations “to protect the health of Tacoma’s residents and environment.” The consensus among these community members is that “our environment must not harm us.”

WHO GETS TO DECIDE?

This answers our third and final research question: What historical changes and transitions do people mention? This question invites us to consider related questions. Do social groups affected by port industries have a say in determining which activities take shape in the tideflats? Are those who been historically excluded from the planning table offered time and space to speak up? These questions guided us in considering why research on historical social tensions is paramount for future port planning and development. Considering the voices that have been excluded in the past can help us form an inclusive vision for the port.

Many people asked for communications to be disseminated in different languages and for a larger notification area related to port projects. People voiced the need to confer with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians regarding land use planning, referring to the Puyallup Tribal Council’s respect for natural habitat: “You are the key to protecting our environment and limiting human destruction of our planet.” As people gave voice to their anger about polluting industries, they insisted that their voices be heard and asked to be able to participate in

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port planning processes. In particular, people who live nearby the port made comments like, “[I] look forward to working with you on this matter.”

Almost one third (29%) of the 500+ pages of comments related to this third theme. Of that portion, 45% directly stated the need for Port and City officials to practice social responsibility, which entails making the right decisions for the people and for the future of Tacoma. People emphasized the importance of restoring and preserving a healthy environment for future generations, with clean air, water, and soil; and creating jobs that will not make us sick. This comment sums up attitudes which combine within this third theme, “we must collectively SHIFT... we really need City officials to become the voice of the changes that must occur.”

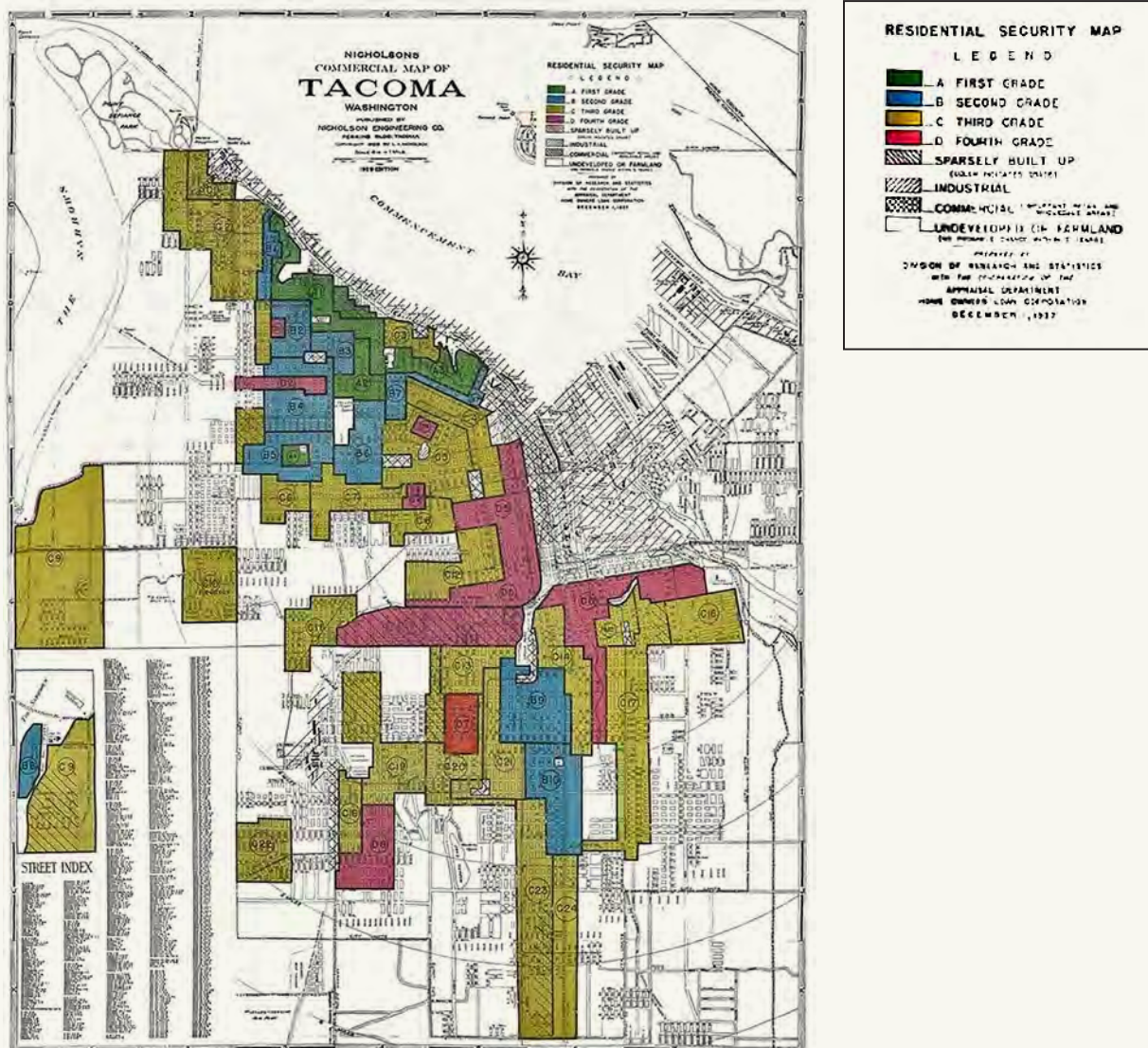
STUDY RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

WHOSE VOICES HAVE BEEN HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED?

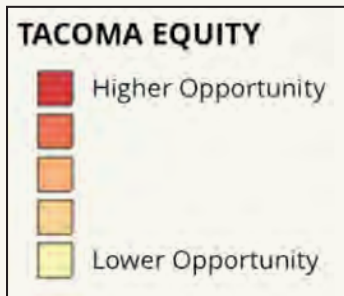
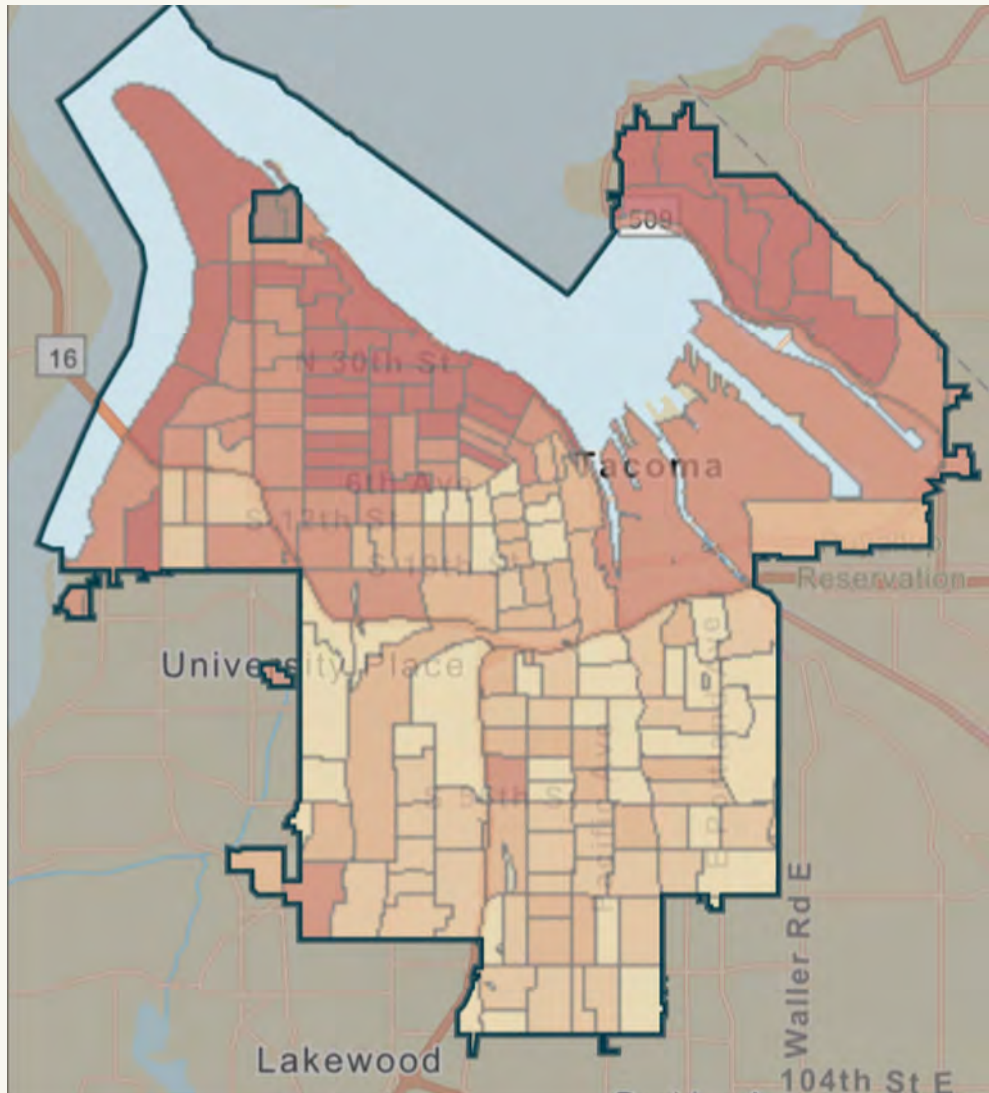
Whose are the voices that have been historically excluded? Thomas Sugrue's award winning urban history of Detroit, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, examined patterns of racial segregation that kept people of color from making economic gains for themselves. Black Americans were systematically locked out of decision making affairs and made to suffer as a result of institutionalized racism. The 1929 Residential Security Map of Tacoma (Map 1) shows redlined areas, designated in the map as fourth

grade (D). Banks and grocery stores pulled out of these redlined neighborhoods, causing a cascading effect of disinvestment which resulted in severe economic downturn for the families living in those neighborhoods. The red areas in the Tacoma Equity Map (Map 2) reflect neighborhoods of higher opportunity today. You can clearly see the lasting impression of redlining practices from 1929 in the map from our time.

1929 TACOMA RESIDENTIAL SECURITY



2019 TACOMA EQUITY MAP



The following table illustrates how our coding process culminated with the three themes discussed previously. The table lists the three key themes (selective codes) and provides a sample of public comments which refer to each.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

SEEKING JUST TRANSITIONS	FACING REAL TRADE-OFFS	WHO GETS TO DECIDE?
<p>Lack of jobs <i>"If our only vision is for jobs that give work to a few, profits to fewer, and harms the health of many then we must find a new vision."</i></p> <p>Short term vs. long term <i>"Tacoma is at a crossroads, and we need to ask some difficult and important questions about our collective future."</i></p> <p>Presence of past pollution vs. what's next <i>"We could be the city of Destiny by creating clean energy jobs and caring for our environment."</i></p>	<p>Environmental injustice <i>"As a resident of Tacoma, I do NOT want more pollution, more danger, more environmental destruction here, nor upstream nor downstream."</i></p> <p>Health and safety <i>"...not convinced that the economic benefits outweigh the negative effects of the petroleum industry."</i></p> <p>Legitimacy of regulations and accountability <i>"The last 17 years I have earned a living in the tideflats...the mills and factories have made drastic improvements in environmental responsibility."</i></p>	<p>Social responsibility, contested definition <i>"Industry of Tacoma must focus on renewable energy and social and environmental responsibility."</i></p> <p>Anger about fossil fuels <i>"Area residents in 2016 stopped the 'World's Largest Methanol Plant' from being built."</i></p> <p>Inclusive planning <i>"Develop a broad community consensus about its (the Tideflats) future..."</i> <i>"Work with and encourage the Puyallup Tribe to be at the table and to be a part of the decision making"</i></p>

CONCLUSION

Leonie Sandercock advises that “if we want to work toward a policy of inclusion, then we better have a good understanding of the exclusionary effects of planning’s past practices and ideologies” (1998, p. 30). If we want our planning practices to be inclusionary, then we must include a myriad of perspectives (those of women, indigenous peoples, people of color, low-income people). This allows for a process that makes space for more possibilities, leaves fewer people out, and redefines planning as an activity informed by many human perspectives and interests.

Partnerships among the Port of Tacoma and other local stakeholders, like the City of Tacoma, the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the City of Fife, Pierce County, and various environmentalist groups, are working together to restore Tacoma’s tideflats. This shows a change in focus among Port officials and their desire to work with community members toward common goals. The City of Tacoma’s decision to formalize a Tideflats Subarea Plan demonstrates additional government efforts to work more closely with community members to plan for the future of Tacoma’s tideflats.

The public comments we reviewed make it obvious that just transitions are needed now. These just transitions must address real trade-offs and everyone should be part of making decisions. Just transitions will ensure that both the opportunities

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and burdens of production are shared more evenly across Tacoma, and that new industrial opportunities are embraced by a city that is prepared for the future. Addressing real trade-offs puts social responsibility at the forefront of decision making processes. It also casts a bright light on environmental justice issues and requires planners and other decision makers to address those issues. By capturing more voices in the planning process, we can ensure that a few do not control the fate of many.

In conclusion, we advise that if historical tensions are not resolved, they will continue resurfacing and fracturing local communities. We encourage port stakeholders to embrace opportunities to research and reflect on public comments related to port/tideflats development and land uses. We suggest that by improving communication strategies, by offering a multitude of access points for decision makers to receive input from community members, and by providing access to opportunities to participate in planning processes, the tideflats/port of Tacoma can be transformed into a space that represents the needs and visions of local people.