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WEBINAR

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

> NATE STORRING (Moderator)
> Co-Executive Director, Project for Public Spaces
>
> SHEILA FOSTER
> Professor of Law and Public Policy, Georgetown University
>
> BEN HELPHAND
> Executive Director, NeighborSpace
>
> NANCY KWAK
> Associate Professor of History, University of California San Diego
>
> JENNIFER S. VEY
> Senior Fellow and Director, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative
> Placemaking, The Brookings Institution

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Jennifer Vey: Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks so much for joining us today for this conversation on innovations in hyperlocal governance. Across the globe, the majority of people live in cities which are centers of innovation, productivity and culture. But we know that the benefits that cities generate are very unequally distributed with stark inequities by income and wealth, by race and ethnicity and geography preventing too many places from meeting the needs of too many people.

Place governance, that is, a collaboration of local actors making decisions that help shape their communities, can be vital to helping address these challenges. Through neighborhood cooperatives, friends of organizations, community land trust, business improvement districts, and many other formal and informal structures, place governance helps build and sustain social capital, giving communities a voice and even a level of power in the production, delivery and management of urban assets or local resources.

For the next hour, we're going to discuss themes from two books on innovations in place governance, "Co-Cities: Innovative Transitions Towards Just and Self-Sustaining Communities" by Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione, and "Hyperlocal: Place Governance in a Fragmented World," edited by Nate Storring and myself. Sheila and I are going to start off the webinar by providing brief overviews of our respective books, and then Nate is going to moderate a discussion that also includes Nancy Kwak from UC San Diego and Ben Helphand from NeighborSpace in Chicago, on how hyperlocal policies and practices from the U.S. and around the globe are helping to create more connected, just and resilient communities. So I'm going to pass it on to Sheila to get us started.

Sheila Foster: Wonderful. Many thanks. I can't start my video. There we go. Many thanks. Can we have the slides, please? It's wonderful to be here and to be a part of both of these amazing books which are connected. And I'm going to start by giving an overview of Co-Cities, which is the result of about a ten year process— go back to the first slide, if you could— which starts really from work that my coauthor Christian Iaione and I have been doing around thinking about the idea of the urban commons, urban collective goods that communities or specific geographic populations are overseeing and even governing.

To the idea of the city as a commons, the city as a shared infrastructure in which we see a lot of different forms of collective cooperation, co-housing, community gardens, shared broadband infrastructure, energy communities, community land trusts, etc. So that's the kind of conceptual basis of the book. Next slide, please.

Based on our initial idea of the city as a commons and the idea that there are a lot of urban commons in different kinds of cities that exist at the neighborhood level or the community level, we undertook a larger empirical project, which was really to try to understand what those collective forms of resource governance look like. And we were very much walking in the methodological footsteps of Elinor Ostrom, who won the Nobel Prize for her work identifying governed or collectively governed commons in the natural environment, around natural resources. But our work differs a little bit in the sense that not only are we looking at these kinds of collectively governed resources of various types in cities, but understanding the idea that cities in different areas of the globe are really governed very differently than we govern the natural world, which are fisheries and forests and other things that communities may be self-governing.

So the insights in the book are also taken from the results of this empirical project. And in the book, we focus on about 30 or so exemplary case studies that we thought really exemplify what we call the design principles that create a co-city, a city that can be governed collaboratively at the neighborhood level, but often with the participation of multiple actors. Next slide, please.

So in the book, we kind of walk through these principles and the conceptual basis and some of the case studies and extract what we call are these design principles much in the way that Ostrom did so in the natural environment. And the, the recurring features of the kinds of collectively governed resources that we were able to identify, including NeighborSpace, which is one of our guests today, the head of which is one of our guests, these are the design principles.

There are collective forms of governance around resource, that the state is very much enabling or facilitating, the state being a higher level of government, often the local government, that multiple actors and resources are pooled that enable different collectivities to govern these resources, what we call pooling economies, that a lot of this happens on an experimental basis, not always as a result of policy, but often bottom up experiments, but sometimes with the city or the mayor's office, and that technology or access to technology, to platforms and other forms of connectivity are essential to these. Next slide, please.

And these are the actors and resources that we see as recurring features of these partnerships that enable these community-based collective forms of resource governance. And the chapter in the hyperlocal book that I wrote really relates to how we think about the multi, multi-

stakeholder partnerships and other kinds of partnerships that come together around place governance. Next slide.

And then the last slide is really the kinds of collective governing institutions and policies that we identify in the book. And again, they range from community land trust to public community packs to digital platforms, to energy communities and other kinds of connected resources. So with that, I'll stop there and hopefully be able to address any questions you have about that. And I'll turn over to Jennifer.

Jennifer Vey: Great. Thanks so much, Sheila. So I'll talk a little bit about the Bass Center and our work and kind of how it relates to this whole concept around hyperlocal governance. So we established the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking in 2018 with the mission of inspiring public and private and civic sector leaders to make transformative place investments that generate widespread social and economic benefits. And our work really centers around you can see it here on the screen, this new integrated place-led development approach— what we call transformative placemaking— focused on creating places or hyper local areas that are economic, dynamic and locally empowering, connected, where the built environment is accessible and sustainable, and which are socially and culturally vibrant and inclusive.

These outcomes both support and are supported by these kind of robust civic infrastructures that are local or locally organized, inclusive and support network building. In other words, what we refer to as place governance. In fact, at every turn in the early days of the center's work, studying and engaging with communities, it just became increasingly clear how vital place governance, kind of whatever form it takes is for giving stakeholders a structure through which to share ideas, concerns and advocate for coordinated investments and to co-design their community improvement strategies. Next slide.

So today there are uncounted thousands, likely tens of thousands of place governance structures in the United States and around the globe. And what they all have in common is that they use a specific geographic grounding to situate their work. It could be called place-based or place-rooted, place conscious. These structures may be made up of one or more organizations operating in either a singular or an overlapping geography, and they, including private civic or business institutions such as my neighborhood association, or even a chamber of commerce, community-based nonprofit organizations, public private entities. Sheila talks about these in her chapter, such as business

improvement districts, or even more formalized public entities like New York City's community boards or Los Angeles's neighborhood councils, or even D.C.'s Advisory Neighborhood Commissions.

All these organizations have a pretty huge range of missions and capacity. So at one end of the range is place management, which is really just the targeted delivery of services, beautification and programing in particular areas, often a park or a public plaza [inaudible] that kind of requires special funding and maintenance that's outside of what the public sector can, should, maybe is even willing to provide. At the other end of the range of place governed activities is place production. Basically, the literal building or development of places, historically undertaken in the US primarily by the private sector and occasionally by the public sector. New organizational forms are attempting to combine the motivations and the accountability frameworks of the public and private sectors in a whole range of different kinds of public private partnerships or even public private plus partnerships that Sheila talks about in her chapter of our book.

The thing is, though, place governance can be controversial. Proponents argue it's sufficient, it's effective, for tackling place-based challenges and promoting economic development with or without the hindrances of government bureaucracy. Basically a way to make improvements to places that government, governments cannot or will not or maybe should not undertake. Aside from efficiency, place governance, governance can be used to promote equity. Place-focused organizations are often uniquely positioned to kind of bridge that gap between economic development and social justice by making a case for inclusive growth, ideally by ensuring that local stakeholders have that voice and agency in proactively determining the desired outcomes for their place and the strategies to achieve, achieve them.

Critics, on the other hand, argue that this new form, these kind of forms of governance, formalizes just sort of another phase of decline of the public sector, where any success of private sector management in delivering municipal services, basically just de-legitimatizes local government, governmental authority. The privatization of public services and the creation of hyper local funding sources to do so can, critics will say, represent kind of a form of hoarding that serves to only narrow interests or diverts dollars from under-resourced neighborhoods and just continues to just create more wealth-based disparities in the provision of public services.

Of course, all these benefits and critiques can be true of any given organization or place at the same time, just as every place is unique, so too is a very different kind of place governance

arrangement. Again, there are a lot of them, and it just makes it very, very hard to generalize. That said, all these questions around power and accountability clearly are central concerns of any place governance practice. Less power, who are the organizations accountable to, how can accountability be operationalized, how can it be measured or monitored, all these issues that we're going to get into in a moment in this in this conversation. Next slide.

So as prevalent as place governance is and all the controversies that are surrounding it, the field isn't even really recognized, and remarkably little has been written about it. And, you know, in terms of particularly how and why these organizations were created, the kinds of structures that emerged over time, the very role that they play and the people and places they don't, they do and don't represent. So this is really why Nate and I decided to put together this book with this great set of authors. And through the set of eight chapters, it really explores the evolving tensions, challenges, opportunities associated with place governance, and then make some recommendations for creating and reforming and sustaining structures that just benefit more people and places.

So I'll very quickly just sort of highlight some of the chapters, but then I want to move us right on to our discussion. Next slide. So we have an introductory chapter that kind of just sets the terms for the rest of the book, sets the big context, exploring existing literature around these issues. Chapter two gets into the history of how we even got here today, looking all the way back to colonial times. Chapter three is by Sheila, and it gets into this question around who governs by looking at four distinct models of place governance that have different mixes of public, private and community leadership and involvement. And she really starts to get into some of these tensions and tradeoffs that we're going to talk about in a minute. Chapter four by Juliet Musso looks at Los Angeles particularly to examine issues, looks across a couple of different kinds of place governance structures and really starts to dissect these issues of power. Next slide.

Chapter five really zooms in on bids to really interrogate issues around who benefits and who doesn't from various structures. Chapter six by Elena Madison and Joy Moses looks at the very complex issue of homelessness in the public realm and kind of takes a lot of what was in the other chapters and really looks at a lot of these issues through this, through this one really, really timely and important issue. Chapter seven by Nancy Kwak, who we're going to hear from on our panel today, looks beyond U.S. borders to look at some of the models globally and we'll hear about some of those.

And then finally, chapter eight by Tracy Hadden Loh, works for the Bass Center, and Nate just wraps up by synthesizing key themes and then spotlighting a lot of promising practices for moving forward. So what we're going to do in today's discussion is to focus on all these opportunities and possibilities around hyperlocal governance, both formal and informal spaces or communities, as well as some of these fractures and challenges around place governance. And so I'm going to turn it over to Nate to kind of introduce the rest of the panel and jump start what I know is going to be a pretty interesting conversation. Thanks.

Nate Storring: All right. Thanks, Jennifer. So, yeah, my name is Nate Storring, I'm the co-executive director of Project for Public Spaces and a coeditor on Hyperlocal with Jennifer. And as she said, I mean, we're really lucky to have a wonderful panel of speakers here today to dig into some of the sort of how hyper, hyperlocal governance structures are really evolving today. What are some of those sort of frontiers and innovations that are happening right now? So I'll invite all of our speakers to join us with their videos. Hello, welcome. And as a reminder, if you're listening and you have questions for our panelists, you can submit them on Twitter using the hashtag urban governance, all one word, or by emailing them to events at Brookings dot edu. So please feel free to do so throughout our conversation and we'll get to those, those questions at the end.

So to kick things off, I would like to turn over to one of the practitioners on the call, Ben. So Ben Helphand, you know, you are the co, or the executive director, I should say, of NeighborSpace. And I'd love to hear a little bit more about your specific model and how it kind of fits into the introduction that we just received from Sheila and Jennifer.

Ben Helphand: Sure. Thank you, Nate. It's really wonderful to be here. Do we want to pull up my slides real quick. I just want to say before I jump in that it's been really gratifying to read these two books over the last few weeks and to feel for, you know, one of the rare times that I felt that the kind of work that I do has been really accurately captured. And it's wonderful to see because we're very aware in this field of local place governance that if, if our work is going to get to scale, it has to be explained clearly from a policy perspective because that's what's going to lead to more funding and support. So I think I feel like these two books represent kind of a, a shift in the direction of things. So it's, it's very heartening for me.

So NeighborSpace, NeighborSpace is a land trust for community managed open space in Chicago. We've been around since the mid-nineties, and we grew out of two things. One, like like a lot

of things in the, in the urban fabric, we grew out of what was just happening. So there's Brickyard garden you see there established 1975, year I was born, that, that was decades before NeighborSpace was established. So NeighborSpace, you know, formerly grew out of a formal planning process called City Space, which resulted in this wonderful open space plan that still governs a lot of Chicago's open space decisions and investments.

But those planners were actually just looking at what was happening, and they were finding that all across the cities, city, especially in places where there was a lack of access to parks and forest preserves, that people would just claim land, city owned private land, and they would turn them into vegetable gardens, sitting gardens, sculpture gardens, you name it. So the plan just kind of lended a legal framework in which those spaces could exist, which was wonderful, which was a nice innovation. It broke out of the boom-and-bust cycle of community gardens, where gardens would exist for a few years and then fall by the wayside. And it said, no, these, these should be permanent. These can be a long, permanent place in the Chicago's landscape. So the city, the park district and the Forest Reserve agreed to come together and they're still at the table to help support NeighborSpace through an intergovernmental agreement. And we've grown over the years. Next slide, please.

A few gardens every year to today, where we now, you know, we own or otherwise preserve 134 sites across the city. We, usually when people say community gardens, people get an image of an allotment garden in their head, like neat little rows of raised beds. We certainly have a lot of those. I think you can see some behind me in the Lawndale neighborhood there. So but in, on the ground, people are doing all sorts of things and NeighborSpace takes a really agnostic big tent view of of what we will help protect. So there's, you know, over the years it's evolved to be like trails and riparian habitat and art spaces and performance spaces. Some of them are just a field with a fence, and that's what the community wants. And they come together, and they have picnics and that's their thing. More recently, there's been a real uptick in terms of what we call neighborhood farms and especially nature play. So having that kind of forest preserve experience in denser parts of the city. Next slide, please.

I can't emphasize enough that all of our projects are community led. We do not go out into neighborhoods and say, hey, here's a vacant lot, you should do something with this. That is not our role. Communities come to us and either they have a garden that already exists, or they have the nucleus of an idea, the seed of an idea, and we help grow it wherever, however they need, either

through technical assistance or, or, you know, finding grants or through helping to find land. But really, these, none of the projects we work on would happen without the folks that you see in front of you. It's their vision and their community's vision. Next slide.

Behind the scenes we have I call this our flex capacitor, if people remember the Back to the Future, this is the, the kind of flow of activity that makes NeighborSpace sites work. We are not top down. We have these four ingredients come together to help sustain all of these sites. We've got a staff, full time staff of three. So we are not out there, you know, weeding and running 134 gardens. Although when I go to a garden, I can't help myself. But we weed a little bit because I like doing it. No, behind every site there's some combination of these four ingredients. And I would emphasize that it's different levels of ingredients in each garden. Some gardens, it's like the same level, you know, it's like a cocktail, you know, one part, whatever, one part, whatever. In some, in some gardens, they, you know, NeighborSpace has a really, really small role. We're there to preserve the land. We're there for insurance. We're there for the water. That's it. And then you never hear from us.

In other gardens, we have a much bigger role. They need a little bit more help. There's more of a hands-on fundraising role that we would play. Some gardeners have, you know, very strong garden leaders, one garden leader that runs the show. In other gardens, there's more of a, you know, cooperative approach. Sometimes I think of it like, imagine if the United States had a completely different form of government in every single state. You'd have like a constitutional monarchy in one place and a dictatorship somewhere else. That's fine by us, we can deal with that. Next slide, please.

Communities work differently and we recognize that. I think the other programs I've seen, you know, suffer, spaces suffered because they're not flexible enough in terms of their governance possibilities to allow for the neighborhood variations to take place. And I've noticed in some neighborhoods, there's just like, there's absolute deference to one person or one institution. And who am I to say that that's not, that's not how that should work. Like, no, you have to do this in X or Y or Z way. So what does this all lead to? Increase, you know, this is a visualization we've done recently with the Central Park Conservancy, where, where we're looking at community managed gardens as social infrastructure. And increasingly, this is how we see what we do.

Yes, I could give you a list of the acreage preserved, the number of gardeners that are participating and an estimate of the pounds of produce preserved or some kind of storm water measurement or beneficial insects. So but, but really, if we're honest with ourselves, what we hear

from gardeners is they're looking at these kind of outcomes. This is what they're, this is what they're proud of. Through participation in the garden space, others and other spaces, there's increased trust in their community. Through activation of the space, their garden is a recognized venue and an accessible venue that they don't need a permit for or insurance for. They can just go on a Friday evening in the summertime and do a jazz concert and that, it increases their sense of place. That is probably one of the most important pieces here.

And this is a real garden in south, south Chicago, South Merrill Community Garden. It's another one that actually preceded the establishment of NeighborSpace. It was connected with a housing co-op across the street. The area is gentrified a bit over the years and so the housing co-op is gone, but the community around the garden has remained and reinvented itself a couple of times. So, you know, these are the kind of outcomes that when people ask me what makes for a health, well, how do we know if neighbors space gardens are healthy and succeeding? This is what I turn to. Yes, I want to know is like, is the land preserved? Like I'm a good land trust. The land is preserved, it's insured. We have access to water. But what I really care about is does the community have a sense of place? Do the gardeners trust each other? Can new members in the community show up and get involved easily? That's what we're looking for.

Nate Storring: Thanks so much, Ben. That was, it's terrific work and really just, I think, speaks exactly to, you know, what the potential for place governance is, really struck in particular by your sort of balance of structure and messiness, which I think that sort of tolerance for those two things coming together is a big part of what makes this work. So, Nancy, I'd like to bring you into the conversation. I'd love for you to introduce yourself, but also, I'd love for you to tell us a little bit more about some of the exemplary models that you came across in your research for the book. Your chapter was obviously on international models of place governance that potentially the U.S. could be learning from. So please, I'd love to hear a little bit more.

Nancy Kwak: Thanks so much. I'm Nancy Kwak, I'm a faculty member at UC San Diego. I'm in the history department and the Urban Studies and Planning department. I was really inspired by your work Ben, so I'm really happy to be following on your heels here. I'll start by saying that the U.S. actually has a long history of borrowing and thinking intelligently about how overseas ideas might be applied to the US. So despite some of the political rhetoric around American exceptionalism, in practical terms, I think we actually can build on a long set of experiences and potential to learn from

more in the future. And co-governance or hyper, hyperlocal governance are concepts that apply in so many different contexts precisely because they begin at the very local scale, not the national scale.

And so I think because of that approach, and also because the challenges we address extend across borders, I think it's important to consider examples from outside the US. And so the three I'm going to talk about right now, the first one is really thinking at the level of how you infuse existing municipal governance with hyperlocal approaches. And the second, to think about how large-scale projects might be transformed in the way they think about the governance that goes into creating them. And then the last one, looking at much smaller scale projects and how those might be built out to have larger impacts.

So the first example that I want to start with is comes from the Global South and 1989 is perhaps well known to some of the folks in this meeting, and that is the idea of participatory budgeting. Actually, if you don't mind putting up this slide, that would be really great. Thank you. So the second one. Thank you, oops, thank you. So for those of you who are unfamiliar, participatory budgeting was an innovation of a popular front headed by the Workers Party in Brazil. And it was a response to a long history of working against dictatorships and non-democratic governance in that country. But the basic principle of participatory budgeting is, I think, widely applicable, and it's that all citizens should participate in the way resources are allocated. That's a very basic and really important principle that holds all of these experiments together.

Now, the city that they began this experiment in, Porto Alegre had 1.3 million residents at the time. So it's like a sort of a medium to small sized city. And the way it worked was that residents in the smaller subdivisions of the city would meet and discuss what they needed or wanted for the upcoming year. Then they would choose regional delegates. And this part was not controlled by the municipal government. And the number of delegates would be dependent on the number of people showing up for these meetings, which I think was really important in fostering more engagement as well in future meetings. And then after that, the municipal government explained how it used its funds for the prior year.

So there was accountability, a public sort of explanation of the budget, and then also an explanation of the proposed budget for the upcoming year. And then the elected delegates would rank priorities, including internal district level needs and inter-district needs. And this all would eventually be aggregated into a council of participatory budgeting that would then implement this and institute

these into the actual budget. So it's very moving from the grassroots up system of budgeting, and it sort of depends what year. But, you know, it could be up to like a third to 40% of the budget going in this way or being determined in this way.

The effects are really impressive. The IADB, the Inter-American Development Bank, has encouraged other cities to follow this model. The World Bank actually observed, for instance, that municipal sewage system rose from 46 to 85%. The number of children enrolled in public schools doubled. There's just a lot of really impressive statistics on the results of this kind of system. And not surprisingly, if you look at this map here listed or shown in the screen, you'll see that U.S. cities have begun to learn from this model. And these are some of the examples. This is a great site to just sort of explore some of the programs in the US. The largest example is in New York City, where 30 city council districts allocate about $1,000,000 each within the city council members discretionary funds. But these are still obviously much smaller programs and proportionally much, much smaller programs than what you see happening in Porto Alegre. So there's still a lot of room to grow and think about this example.

The next example I'll talk about is the Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project in Seoul. This was actually devised by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and then included general public participation via a citizens committee. And you'll see the Tourism Board's image on the left and then on the right, this is where the stream actually starts. It used to be covered in concrete, it used to be part of a highway system and it was all cleared out. And all the people who are living and selling and residing in this space were also removed and relocated. And the, the bottom corner picture is my students and me taking a tour of the, of the stream.

So in this particular case, the city prioritized expert participants because they saw these experts as being able to persuade rather than to funnel the needs of resident participants living on the site. And at the time, just to give you a sense of how many people we're talking, there were 220,000 merchants. And eventually, because the merchants were so deeply dissatisfied with this mechanism for participating in what would happen on the places that they were living, a public opinion subcommittee had to be created to mediate between the people who resided there and the city government.

Now, the results of this experiment are really interesting, they're really mixed. On the one hand, the project brought this really beautiful, much-needed green space and restoration of a green

space to the northern part of the city. It reduced the urban heat island effect and increased biodiversity. So there are all these benefits and actually people felt a lot of connection to this space in a way that perhaps they hadn't before. So this has become a really important placemaking device for Seoul as a whole. But on the other hand, relocated merchants felt betrayed and ignored by the rest of the city. So again, there's a lot to learn from examples that may not be perfect examples of hyperlocal governance, that may be examples that have problematic aspects.

Going to the last example, we can see how other cities around the world are thinking about global environmental crises at the scale of the hyperlocal also. In Berlin and this particular site, the city actually originally planned to raze Gleidreick, which is actually a triangular space with old rails, what the city perceived to be an abandoned railway space. But because local residents demanded inclusion in the planning process, the biodiversity in this space, as well as the value of this open space to people who are living in like Kreutzberg or Schoenberg, just these neighborhoods nearby became much better understood.

So the city used a process of what they called open community planning with neighborhood surveys, walking tours, planning workshops, and eventually a competitive design process with stakeholders voting. What's interesting about this process is how much mutual education is happening. The city is learning what this space means and what value the space has, and the residents are learning about the planning process and how to participate in and making their voices heard within it. So without this sort of hyperlocal approach to governance and to planning, all the assets of the space might have been lost and the city as a whole worse off. So I go into these three examples from around the world to show really that we have only valuable knowledge to gain from learning more expansively and casting our net wider.

Nate Storring: Awesome. Thank you, Nancy. So I'd love to open it up to a bit more of a conversation. So, first of all, you know, all of the things that we're talking about have a really [cuts out] a component of involving, like the community, right. But who is the community when we actually are talking about these projects? It seems like a really important question to answer and potentially has a bit of a fraught answer. So, Jennifer, do you want to kick us off with that?

Jennifer Vey: Sure. Yeah, this is a big question. It's something that comes up a lot in the book because, you know, I think we sometimes even have a tendency to romanticize who the community is, like under this assumption that everybody in a certain area all kind of is moving in the

same direction or has the same vision for what they want. And, and obviously, that's, that's not true at all, right. I mean, these communities are made up of people, many of whom have different personal needs, their family needs. And so it starts to get into this question of, like, who are we even talking about? And this is particularly true when you think even about the location and even the scale of the effort.

So, you know, whatever is happening, is this something like the Korean example that's really regionally significant? Or is it a small pocket park where really, you know, most of the users are going to be probably in the surrounding area, right. So you've got this kind of geographic dimension on identifying who are you even trying to engage. So that's one thing. On the other hand, then you've got these whole issues around, well, is it a community that's there now, or is, are we thinking about the future. Both kind of maybe generational, but also, particularly these big scale projects, right. But also, who, are these efforts where, you know, we need to think about who should be in the community, right.

So when it comes to even that romanticizing community, well, sometimes you can have hyperlocal governance where they're not, they're thinking about, you know, who's there now, again, probably not even singing, you know, on the same page anyway. But even those loud voices that are trying to basically exclude other people from being part of their community. That gets into a whole other kind of issue. And these are real tensions around hyperlocal governance structures, formal informal ways that we're engaging people because you know whose, it does, it opens up the questions around who the community is, who's represented, who's not, who's in the room, who's not, who are we being held accountable for, and then ultimately, who gets, who's kind of the arbiter of a lot of these of a lot of these decisions.

Ben Helphand: I mean, on some level, you have to embrace the tension. And, you know, after years of working in community open space, at some point, I have to be honest that there is, there is exclusion. And that's, that's part of it. Any time you have a space that has some kind of a barrier, you know, there's going to be people who are inside and people who are outside. But you, you structure it so that you get as much inclusiveness as possible.

So and that's sometimes NeighborSpace's role. You know, we have set some basic rules about, you know, you can't just arbitrarily say these neighbors aren't allowed in, but what you can do and we usually try to focus less on the barrier and who's excluded and more on the what are you

doing there and what does it mean to be involved? You know, this is a garden that's about play and it's kid focused. So if you're going to be involved in it, that's going to be your entry point. This is a garden, it's about food. This is not a place to bring your dog or, or play baseball in.

So like, the function of the space kind of defines what, what subset of the community or communities are going to be involved. And that's okay. And we can support that. And sometimes it's come to a head like we had a garden that is half a dog friendly area and half a kid play space, but the dog friendly area thought that their space should be bigger, so they just kept taking over the whole thing. So what we had to do, you know, they wouldn't work with us at a certain point, it was unresponsiveness from the dog owners. We locked it, the dog side, and we took the gate off the kids' side so that they couldn't use it as a dog friendly area and then waited three weeks and then everybody sat down at the table. So, I mean, that's probably the most extreme that it's gotten for us.

But we have to be attuned to those, to those subtleties and, and not, not delude ourselves into thinking, taking a very simplistic view of what community is or what openness is. We've had some people, you know, sometimes theft, so-called theft or grazing is a, is an issue at community gardens and community farms. And we have you know, we have people who come in and they just pick, they don't care whose plots they are or whether it's communal or not communal, but the response is usually the same. They're like, well, I thought it was a community garden. And we're like, yeah, but you're not actually part of this community yet, but you could be, you know, come on in and get involved. So oftentimes the theft is an opportunity for people to get involved in the project.

So that's what I mean by leaning into those tensions. I think, I think they're important. I think they're ever present. Yeah, and I think we have, we do have a lot to learn from the Berlin example. We've been inspired, Chicago quite a bit by the park that you, you looked at. And I would point out in Gleidreick Park, they have spaces in there that to an American eye would seem private, they're like there's an allotment garden in here and Americans are like if I tried to put that in Millennium Park, people would lose their heads. You know, they're like, you're privatizing the public space. I'm like, yeah, but here's a community that's doing it.

And in Berlin, you see the same thing happening in parkways, where like daycare centers would have a tiny little play area in the parkway or the street, you know, and I was actually able to get Chicago to do that in one little section of a boulevard over here, which was like an amazing victory.

And everybody keeps asking me, like, how did you do that? Like, well, we just got a permit. So it's not, it's all gray area. Yeah.

Nate Storring: Yeah. To your point, Ben, I think like, you know, one of the biggest issues with exclusion is really just the number and diversity of public places and where they are in the city rather than trying to make one public space for everyone all the time. You know, that is, it's a tall order for any public space, even the sort of grandest civic spaces of our cities. So. Ben, I want to ask, you know, in these situations where there is a conflict between, you know, members of the community about, you know, the vision or policies or really specific issues, who is the arbiter? Is there an ultimate arbiter that sort of says, all right, this is how it works?

Ben Helphand: I mean, legally speaking, NeighborSpace would be the arbiter, you know, in the eyes of the city, in the eyes of the court, because as the landowner. But in practice, that's it, I don't think it's almost never come to that. In practice, it's about the community or communities coming together and trying to work it out. And we actually have this in our partnership agreement that when you become a NeighborSpace garden and everybody, every garden leader who's involved like you agree to a conflict resolution process whereby you will first try to work it out yourselves and we have these conflict resolution principles.

If it's super extreme, like we do have a kind of a standing partnership with the Chicago Center for Conflict Resolution, where you can go downtown and sit in a room and work it out. And I would say it's never actually come to that, because the threat, the two times where it's gotten close, the threat of that has gotten people to resolve because they they're like, no, I need, I need to be able to work it out. But I would also say that in practice and our stewardship staff really internalizes this ethos is any conflict is genuinely an opportunity. Like, I know that's like a platitude that people say, but it's, it's actually true. Like, you think about, like, when do we have opportunities to work things out in public in our neighborhoods? Like, we're trained to, like, back off, don't get involved, call a lawyer, call 911, call three, one one, or whatever it is in your city. Don't get involved. And I think that's, you know, something of a trend in the last 40, 50 years.

Community gardens are a place where like we're no, you sit down on this stump and talk to your neighbor and figure it out and talk. You have to be able to, to explain what your vision is for the space or why you want to do what you want to do. And NeighborSpace isn't going to be the judge

upon high saying like, you know, this has to be a butterfly habitat. We're like, no, this has to, you have to go through a process and get the garden behind you. And so it's messy.

Nate Storring: Absolutely. So we talked a lot about the messiness, I feel like, and the sort of grassroots aspects and some of the organizations that are doing this at the small scale. I'd love to zoom out for a moment and talk a little bit about, you know, what is the role of local government in these kinds of organizations, you know, whether it's supporting these kinds of arrangements or also regulating them, right. I think at the beginning, Jennifer, you brought up issues around exclusion, parochialism, all these kinds of things, how do we keep or future users, those kinds of issues. How do we how do we, how does it, how does local government play a role in kind of making sure that we keep the full view. Sheila, do you want to take that one?

Sheila Foster: Yeah, sure. So this is a great discussion. And the answer to that, I think, is connected to what we were just talking about. I mean, and that is, first, I think we have to decide what is place governance for, right. I mean, we've been so far very agnostic about that. But, you know, as I think hyperlocal, the hyperlocal book does well is to kind of make clear that there is place governance for economic development. In my chapter, I talk about the university city district in Philadelphia, in West Philly, the kind of cortex innovation district, the Southwest Partnership in Baltimore and NeighborSpace. And there's hyperlocal governments from the bottom up, right? I call these top down, bottom up models. And I think the local government is kind of the core enabling actor for both top down and bottom up place governance, you know, arrangements.

And I think all of those arrangements exclude because I think if you think they're commons, the limited commons that we put together that has stewards to manage a particular area of the city, or a resource by definition is for something. And if you're for something, then you're, it's not all inclusive, it's for the thing that it's set up for. But I think the local government and in many of these cases, though, not all, as Nancy's talked about, that the city is a core enabling partner, providing often, I think NeighborSpace is a great example of this, providing the necessary infrastructure. They own the land, they clear the title, they help give materials which it controls, often the legal authority to tap into the, the water lines, let's say, and frankly, a lot of other resources.

And that might include, I love the idea of stewardship, right. What we would call the collective governance part. It also might include that kind of, that arbiter role that if something happens, then you have a higher-level authority. But I would also say to Jennifer's point, like, what is this for? We're

not trying to lock in or ossify resources that are public, but over time our need for the resources, something may change, and you don't want to essentially privatize it even for a particular or even vulnerable community. And so I think the, by having what Elinor Ostrom called a nested government structure, which is what NeighborSpace has, when you have stewards at the bottom, basically collectively governing, but it's nested within this higher authority, which I actually think we argue you cannot avoid if you're out of the natural environment and you're into cities, it's a heavily regulatory environment.

And I think the last thing I would say is that there are other actors that have important roles. So what we found is that often there are knowledge actors. Universities can play really important roles here in helping put these place governance things in place. And they're often fiscal partners, as in the, the Philadelphia example, and the cortex example, and also civic and nonprofit organizations in the community can encourage broad and deep participation by residents, can also play an arbiter role and frankly, experimentation and innovation. So I think the local government is a, is a core enabling factor. But to the point of, I think hyperlocal governments, there are often lots of other actors in these arrangements. And I think the hyperlocal book is a very good example of the varieties that that takes. So I'll stop there.

Nate Storring: Great. So anyone else want to jump in on that question of the role of government? Yeah, Ben, please.

Ben Helphand: Well, I always think of the, the greatest thing that our, NeighborSpace, we're beholden to, like, every unit of government in Cook County. And I think Illinois has the, the ignobleness of having more units of government than any state. So it's lots. And the greatest gift that we've been given by our partners is really just permission. Permission giving, permission to use the land, access to, to free land. You know, none of it would be possible without that. There are certain units of government that don't give permission for, you know, in wide swaths of the city. And it just shuts it down. It's the end of the conversation. You've got a community that lives right next to this incredible untapped asset. Maybe it's owned by a utility, or a stormwater entity and they just can't use it because that entity doesn't have or the community doesn't know about the pathway to get access to that, to that land. Or the community doesn't have any legal standing, it's not a 501(c)(3), it doesn't have insurance, so it can't get to that land.

So, you know, you know, the greatest thing I think Chicago did 25 years ago, I always think of the analogy of the cookie jar. Is it, it chose to put this land up in the cookie jar on the top shelf so that whenever it had the impulse to, to sell it to a developer, it couldn't because it already put it in NeighborSpace. So I guess we're the cookie jar. So but yeah, I think permission giving has been, has been huge and there's huge potential in that. I mean, even in Chicago where we're doing pretty well, there's still, you know, you know, so many acres that are untapped that could be activated. You know, most of the attention is in the denser parts of the city where, you know, frankly, people are a little more entitled. They know how to work the systems better; they know who to ask. And then there's other parts where people don't, don't know those pathways. So.

Nate Storring: Right, absolutely. So, you know, we have a few minutes left and I'd love to get some questions from the audience. So, again, if you have any, you can ask them on Twitter with hashtag urban governance. You can also send them to events at Brookings dot edu. But we also have some here, when people registered, they were able to ask a question. So here are a couple. First of all, work on shared resources at the commons is generally most successful when people have a stake in the outcomes. How hyperlocal must this be to be effective? Can it grow to scale to larger units of stewardship?

Sheila Foster: I would point to NeighborSpace is a really, it's not the only example, but it is an exemplary example. And I want to focus on this idea of nested, that is that you can only scale these, I think if you have an institution or a design in mind that scales it and that builds in number one, the values, who are we doing this for? I don't like, love the term stakeholder. In our book, we try to move from stakeholder to shareholder. We want to make sure that the communities that are doing the work of the governance and that are, could be as in a trust, as in a community land trust not an urban land trust are part of the governance structure, but they're there with other actors. But, but so a stakeholder to me has a seat at the table, a voice in participatory budgeting on the board, but a shareholder shares in the real benefits of the governance.

So, so in and so that's why I say we cannot be agnostic about police governance. Who is this benefiting? Who is reaping that? Who are the shareholders? And shareholdership could be through a community benefit agreement, it could be dividends, it could be people living on the land as a community land trust or having businesses on the land. But I think that that scale really has to do with thinking through nestedness, how you allow collective governance at a community level, on a place

level, at a hyperlocal level, but have accountability and management and other things at a higher level. And that's very much an Ostriom industry and I think brilliant, because that's what she recognized, is that once you collectively govern a larger commons, a regional commons, you can't do it at the community level and it's not just about the communities.

Ben Helphand: I think, I think she's absolutely right about the nestedness. I would just point out there's like a, there's like a tipping point in terms of the burden on the local community of the things that go along with that governance. So we find that for like a small-scale community garden or community farm, like people can make it work in their spare time. You know, if it's like, you know, 15,000 square feet or 20,000 square feet, but when it starts to get bigger, it's a big burden. You know, you have to have a lot of disposable time. You have to have the ability to fundraise. And so we have found certain gardens and other projects that once they get to a certain size, like they need to formalize, they're starting their own 501(c)(3) and then they're going to the same funders we are.

So there's, there's a— and I think this is where maybe the US models could learn from, from other countries— where we need to support those groups. Like it's unreason— if we want local place governance— it's unreasonable for us to expect to be able to pass the governance of these spaces off to these local communities and then not support those communities in the work involved in that governance. It's just too much of a burden. NeighborSpace is an organization that fills some of that role, being the fiscal agent and taking on some of the bureaucratic burden. But there's only so much you can do. Like we can't, you're not going to run the programing directly because then it's not local anymore.

So I think we do need to be really honest in local place governance at a certain point, like there has to be a funding stream for these local groups and then you blow things up again because it's like, who's going to, who's going to, who's in charge of that money? You know, if the city is passing money off to local groups, there's going to be fighting about who gets that that money. But I think that is what, what needs, that what that is what needs to happen. And there's an enormous resistance on the part of municipalities to shake out that kind of funding, especially in terms of the world of maintenance.

Sheila Foster: I will note just a footnote that cities like New York and L.A. are now funding efforts to establish community land trust in the millions of dollars. But I agree that in Europe and other

places, there's far more state funding for this. And in our book, the European examples are all paid for by either the European Union or the cities themselves. But you're right. But that is starting to happen.

Nate Storring: Right. I think, you know, one of the things we point out in the book is just that exactly what you said, Ben, that the, the budgets of all of these nonprofits is actually hiding the true cost of what we're, of the benefits we're getting in the public realm. And so we really need to do a better need to do a better job of accounting for that and asking a little bit more, I think, of government in terms of supporting the true cost. So we have another question here that actually I think gets at something we haven't really touched on yet. What is the role of iterative, collective, collective discovery in developing trusting relationships among strange bedfellow collaborations?

Ben Helphand: I love that question.

Nate Storring: Me too, it speaks to, speaks a lot to our work as well.

Ben Helphand: Yes.

Nate Storring: Would you like to jump in, Ben?

Ben Helphand: I mean, you got to be able to fail, we talk about, you've got to be willing to fail. And you got to be, you know, you know, open to your, your collaborators to fail. And I think in, you know, the Chicago Park District, for example, has less of an openness to failure. There's bigger dollars involved. They don't want to make a $2 million investment and have it fail. In smaller community managed spaces, it's it's okay, it's more of a learning opportunity. And it signals to the broader community that it's okay to try things out. And I think that's really important and kind of rare in modern cities where the stakes are so high, but especially for young people to have that entry point where you can try something out and there is a real physical space where they're like, no, you can come in and do this, try it here, do your performance, build that thing, build that weird bench, it's okay. It might fall down and then we'll build something else.

We have examples like that. We have this very bizarre rain catchment system that was an inverted trumpet vine that caught very little water, but we cut it down and turned it into this incredible, incredible performance space which is now thriving. So it's okay for things to, to evolve over time. And I would say also the pace of design is also really important. There's this assumption that you design something, then you build it and then you use it. That's not how it really works in community managed spaces often it is iterative. You do phase one, see how it works, and you go in and you do another little section.

I actually remember in Berlin that seemed to be the way they did playgrounds. They would do like one element and then five years later go and add another element. It was, it was like a museum of, of play trends for the last three decades. It was really kind of cool. That tends not to be how we design and build spaces in this country. But maybe it should be.

Nate Storring: Absolutely.

Jennifer Vey: Yeah. Nate and I had a great opportunity in in Bellevue, outside of Seattle, Washington State. And this exact kind of issue came up, right. A fairly new place, relatively speaking. Very, very clean, very safe. There was a lot of pride in that. And yet all these conversations kept coming up around, and, you know, Nate said it in our panel in front of 600 people, like you got to be willing to get a little bit of it, a little bit messy.

And part of that is coming back to this question about government's role is being that enabler, right. And being willing to kind of loosen the reins a little bit and letting different groups come in and try things out. I mean, and look, we're you know, cities are, these aren't bell jars, you know what, where they're meant to be fixed in some sort of point in time. That goes for all communities. They're going to evolve and change anyway. And we need the space to be able to allow that to happen. And I think to your point, you know, sometimes things aren't going to work and then you try something else.

Sheila Foster: And I will say that universities can play that role, too. I mean, one of things we write about in the book are urban labs that sometimes cities set up and those can be platforms for the messiness. So the laboratory in Mexico City, New York City, had a NYC ex co-lab in Brownsville in other neighborhoods where they brought, you know, tech entrepreneurs in the city and, and others together. But also universities play a central role, can play a central role in being that platform for what, what Ben said, I don't want to lose because when we've worked on the ground, we're in Baton Rouge right now and we've done quite a bit of work in other places.

We have what's called a co-city cycle where we start with [inaudible] talk, you know, you build trust by practicing in a garden, you're building a garden, and then you prototype the design of whatever you want to do, and then you put it in place and you test it and then you see how it's going, and then you tweak it and continue. That there has to be a notion, what we call experimentalism, that you don't just kind of cut and paste from, from what someone else is doing, nor do you kind of say, okay, we've done it and that's it. But that there has to be room for messiness and discovery. And I

think there have to be platforms to allow either at the local government level or the university, right. To allow that iterative process to unfold in a space where people are on a level playing field.

Nate Storring: Yeah, I think you nailed it. I mean, I think in our work, what we often see is that that sort of opportunity for experimentation, the short timeline around it in particular is really, really important to building up the muscles of governance because you're building trust. You're also showing that things can actually get done and happen and that you have collective capacity. And so it can be a really important sort of process of growing the either formal or informal capacity of a group of people to actually do things. And on that note, I think we're at time, so I'll turn it over to Jennifer to take us home.

Jennifer Vey: Well, again, thanks, everyone, for joining. This has been a fantastic conversation. I wish we had more time because I think there's so much more to say and so many examples out there. But, you know, in the meantime, you know, read the books if you're so inclined. And, you know, stay tuned for, I think, the work of all of us and so many organizations out there that are doing great work in this space, a lot of exciting things happening and a lot to learn from them. So thanks again.