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The Emotional and Pragmatic Life of Cities under Pressure: Lessons Learned from an
Ethnographic Study of Ferndale, Michigan

By

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Abstract

American communities are suffering a crisis of finances and of confidence. Shrinking revenues, a depressed economy and a fractured and disillusioned public has created acute challenges to our system of self-government. This research was an ethnographic investigation into the emotional and pragmatic life of a Michigan city that experienced considerable financial hardship, program and staffing cuts, and citizen anger and frustration. Using a small sample survey and interviews with citizens and public officials the results explored the emotional—aspirations for a better community and frustration and hopelessness with the political system—and the pragmatic side—attempts to gain the public’s trust and to manage a city with ever-shrinking resources—of civic culture. Results fill large gaps in the existing literature and direct the conversation towards the understudied emotive components of civic life.

Key Words: devolution, citizen committees, hopelessness, identity retention, mechanics of government, trust

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With a looming debt crisis, an aging population, increased demands on public services and a reluctance of both politicians and voters to raise taxes, the social contract between citizen and government is being redefined in ways previously unheard of. Laying off police officers and teachers never entered into the realm of budget talks or into the public forum, and such actions were almost always reserved for the most dysfunctional cities that had failed to get a grip on expenses. But never before did the prospect of large-scale reductions in government services—be it staffing or programs ever enter into the government psyche. Ronald Reagan in the 1980's made the phrase “Government is The Problem” an indelible part of our country's political narrative. The truth is, most everyone in America enjoys the services their government provides: and Americans enjoy and expect high-levels of services.

While many Americans enjoy the services provided by government, a growing number of us refuse to or grumble about paying so much for these services or believe that we can enjoy the same level of services without paying anything more to maintain them. The cognitive dissonance between these two positions is astounding. This position is akin to the infamous “Keep Your Government Hands off My Medicare” protester at an anti-spending Tea Party rally. Some of the most ardent opponents of government are also some of the most prolific users of said government services like Medicare and Social Security (Krugman 2012).

While it would be impossible or at least extremely difficult for all Americans to understand the true costs of running a government and what it takes to provide the services most

of us profess to love dearly, we can look at the dynamic interplay between citizens, politicians and public officials in a time of enormous financial pressure. It has been said that trying times reveal the core of one's character and the crisis facing local government today is insight into the conversation Americans are now having about government—what they want it to be and what they will or will not contribute for it. The most elemental desires of these groups are clearly exposed when money is tight—self-interest bubbles up from the depths that civil society once kept at bay. What follows is an in-depth analysis and exposé of the emotional and pragmatic experiences of one Michigan City's struggles to maintain essential services while revenues dropped and citizens balked at tax-increases.

This project originally started as a contrast between two metro-Detroit cities—two cities, Troy and Ferndale, with similar ethnic make-up but large differences in politics, income, education and culture. The original plan was to do a compare-and-contrast analysis between the two cities and draw conclusions about how the differences between them manifested themselves in how they were governed and what the citizens expected from each government. I realized early on in my research that there was no need to compare. One only had to examine one city to see the rifts, pressures, pride and disappointment between citizen and government to understand this brave new-world of Recession-era governance. It was ugly, and it was messy. Since both towns had vocal opponents and supporters of increased taxes for municipal operations, studying one city, Ferndale, provided enough material for a thoughtful analysis.

Settling on one city I started out on a journey that would take me from the halls of municipal power to the living rooms of the disenchanting; from the trendy coffee shops of

downtown to sharing beers in a garage, this project was an in-depth and human analysis of one of the most common, essential and complex issues of our time: what we want government to be and do and how much we're willing to sacrifice, both monetarily and emotionally, to make that happen. My informants were all engaged and concerned members with important stakes in the community—whether as a beat cop or the voice of the conservative minority, everyone had a role to play. And it is precisely this human-level interaction that makes this research so important.

Too often, especially in the midst of a Presidential election, commentators, researchers and officials are consumed with the national political scene. The so-called Red State vs. Blue State, Liberal vs. Conservative dichotomy subsumes all discourse about governance. The incendiary invective of Rush Limbaugh or the polarizing views of Chris Mathews have reduced the once-rational American conversation on government into a pessimistic, blood-lusting sport that is increasingly about rewarding special interests and campaign donors over the good of the country and sound governance. But while the majority of Americans' political attention is on what happens in Washington or what the Republicans say about the Democrats, the truth is that most governance doesn't happen in the halls of Washington. Rather, it occurs in the musty fire halls, the drab City Council chambers and in the sleek shadows of police cruisers idling on a hot summer's evening. This is where the real ground moves in American governance—where decisions made by elected officials and the citizens who elected them have real and immediate consequences. Politicians can argue and filibuster in Washington with little to no effect on the daily life of an American, but decisions made on the local level can, and do, have immediate and

profound effects from police not responding to animal complaints to firefighters not going into burning houses.

Context

Ferndale is a medium-sized inner-ring suburb that shares a border with Detroit (Eight Mile Road) with a 2010 population of around 19,000 residents, who are 90% white. The per capita income in 2010 was \$28,133. The average age was 35 and about 10% of residents were senior citizens (65 and up); about 60% of the population has less than a college education and 8% of the population lives at or below the Federal poverty line (Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments, 2011).

Ferndale, as the above descriptors show, can be considered a blue-collar community, with many residents working in the trades or manufacturing. But manufacturing, particularly the auto industry, has been hit hard by the New Economy and the 2008 “Great Recession” and hundreds of thousands jobs have left the region in the last 50 years. Ferndale has been fortunate to have new economic activity replace the manufacturing and small shops that once dominated civic life. Ferndale is now considered a “hip” and “cool” place to hang out in and has a vibrant downtown at Nine Mile and Woodward. Barbershops and supermarkets have been replaced by boutiques and bars. Ferndale is also considered the hub of the Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender community in Michigan and, until recently, was the site of the annual Gay-Pride event known as “Pride Fest” (Kohn, 2001).

With the influx of young adults seeking entertainment at a cheaper price than neighboring cities like Royal Oak and Birmingham—with exclusive shops like Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus—Ferndale has become a cultural mecca of sorts and has taken on a politically-liberal atmosphere with the City Council passing a “Human Rights” ordinance pushed by Gay-rights activists and spending \$500,000 to make city-hall “environmentally-friendly.” The local library even has a “living” roof that recycles water for the building. The current Mayor and his predecessor are both openly gay—the first for any mayor in Michigan. Additionally, Ferndale’s elected local and state officials are all members of the Democratic Party and, in the 2008 Election, Barack Obama won the city 56%-42%. As Ferndale has become a cultural destination for many, it has attracted many young people and young families who are able to rent or buy houses at affordable rates. In 2012, the average home was valued at \$80,000 and 59% of homes were occupied by an owner and 32% were rentals (“City data: Ferndale,.” & Kohn, 2001).

Police and Fire Departments

Ferndale also traditionally has had a high level of civic engagement and pride in city services. In 2009, the City conducted a Citizen’s Satisfaction Survey that found the citizens were very pleased with their police, fire, and public works services (“Colbalt citizen satisfaction,” 2009). The City of Ferndale provides a full-time police department with 48 employees assigned to patrol, detective, SWAT, narcotics and traffic units. In 2010, the police department received almost 16,000 calls for service and made 1773 arrests (“Ferndale police department,” 2011).

Ferndale’s proximity to Detroit makes crime an important issue to many residents, who voiced their frustration with police officer layoffs in 2010 and who also feared the influx of

crime from Detroit. For being so close to Detroit—ranked consistently as one of the most violent and most dangerous cities in the United States, per F.B.I. data, and one must only travel a few blocks outside of Ferndale to find neighborhoods that bear more resemblance to post-war Germany than to a major American city. The Ferndale police are very effective at deterring crime but every year the city experiences several instances of violent crime every year from murder to felonious assaults to armed robberies. Even with these significant events the majority of residents, 75%, believed that Ferndale was a safe place to live and had a positive image ("Colbalt citizen satisfaction," 2009).

Ferndale also has a full-time fire department that provides fire suppression and medical care and transportation in the city. The department staffs five engines, one ladder truck and one Advanced Life Support (ALS) Ambulance. The department has 26 Firefighters who are cross-trained as Paramedics—the highest level of pre-hospital care. In 2009 the department responded to 2509 calls for service with an average response time of less than 4 minutes ("Ferndale fire department," 2009). The department is also the highest rated—according to the satisfaction survey—service provider in the city ("Colbalt citizen satisfaction," 2009). Additionally, the Ferndale Fire Department provides fire and EMS service for Pleasant Ridge, a city on Ferndale's northwest border and fire services for Royal Oak Township—a small municipality to the southwest.

Recession, Revenue Crisis, Public Safety Layoffs and Headlee Override Millage

While many residents and visitors to Ferndale were focused on the nightlife, culture and walkability of Ferndale, city leaders were dealing with an unprecedented drop in tax revenue

during 2009-2010. The national economy entered a recession during the fall of 2008 and lost 1.2 million jobs lost by the end of 2007. The economy lost hundreds of thousands of jobs a month and the unemployment rate in Michigan was around 15%. There were publicly-funded bailouts of the banking and auto industries, not to mention the collapse of the housing market from 2005-2006 highs; virtually all municipalities in Michigan were in a financial hole.

Property taxes are collected in an unusual manner: they are collected based on values from the preceding 18-24 months. (See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of Michigan property taxes and what Ferndale residents pay). In 2008, when the national economy crashed and housing values plummeted, local governments were not immediately affected. Communities like Ferndale were still collecting taxes based on 2006-2007 values which were relatively high compared to later values. Many city leaders hoped that the economy—and property values—would rebound in the next 18-24 months so there wasn't a drastic drop in revenue. That rebound never occurred. As President Obama took office in January 2009, most Americans—including officials at the highest levels of the U.S. Government—did not know how dire the economic situation truly was (Sweet, 2008).

Without the expected recovery, Ferndale's finances—along with that of countless municipalities in Michigan and, indeed, throughout the nation—plummeted. In 2009—when property taxes were still high, but housing values plummeting—Ferndale took in 9.25 million dollars in property taxes. Less than two years later, that number was 8.5 million dollars ("City of ferndale," 2011). In addition to this loss of almost a million dollars, Ferndale was hit again with a

loss in State Shared Revenue or SSR. (See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of SSR and its relation to Ferndale's fiscal crisis).

Heading into the 2011-2012 fiscal year, Ferndale had a \$17.4 million dollar budget with a \$2.3 million dollar deficit and it was obvious that drastic cuts were needed to remain financially solvent. It is important to note that, unlike the Federal Government, the State of Michigan and its municipalities must balance their budgets every year.

Additionally, the majority of the City's budget is devoted to personnel and, like most cities, 60% of the budget was devoted to the Police (\$6.5 million) and Fire (\$3.7 million) departments (Kowalski 2011). Given that the budget had to be balanced and that personnel accounted for the majority of city spending, the City began trimming its workforce: 1. 28% of city hall support staff were laid off; 2. city hall reduced its hours by closing on Fridays; 3. animal control services were eliminated; 4. eight police officers and four firefighters were laid off—the entirety of these cuts came from road patrol officers and firefighters on the ambulance and fire trucks—not from management (2011). But there was no real way for the city to completely cut its way out of its fiscal state—to do so would be to drastically alter the services provided by the city and, according to many, compromise the safety of residents of and visitors of Ferndale.

City Council's goal was not to go initially to the voters for a tax increase. After the cuts to public safety and city administration, City Council—following years of tradition—appointed a 12-member panel of residents to study the City's finances and to make recommendations to City Council about different options to balance the budget. The Financial Planning Committee (The Committee) started a 14 week-long investigation that was open to the public. The Committee

studied three options: first, a dedicated Public Safety Millage where the tax revenue could only pay for police and fire; second, a general fund millage with the proceeds going to the city's general fund where it could be spent on anything; lastly, no millage at all.

The Committee, in its final report, reported to City Council that the no millage and a public safety millage represented two extremes for the city. The no-millage would necessitate the elimination of the recreation department and Downtown Development Authority—which has helped promote Ferndale's image and bring business to town; elimination of maintenance of public parks; suspension of sidewalk replacement and, most chilling, the elimination of the Ferndale Police and Fire Departments and contracting those services to a neighboring jurisdiction like the Michigan State Police or the Oakland County Sherriff's Office and contracting EMS to a private ambulance service. Needless to say, this was a very unpalatable option for many residents, especially given the intense pride and satisfaction most residents get from these services.

The second option, a dedicated Public Safety Millage was not that appealing, either. A 10 mil Public Safety millage would be required to maintain current staffing levels without any additional cuts. But 10 mils was an extremely high rate that would have raised the total millage rate about 21% from 48.0584 to 58.0584. While this would have been enough to maintain the “status quo,” the political ramifications could have been potent. Ferndale already had one of the highest rates in the State and asking residents to pay more for the same services would be a tough sell, even in a community as politically “liberal” as Ferndale (Michigan Department of Treasury, 2010). Additionally, the Unions representing the Police and Fire departments had not agreed to

any cuts or concessions in contract talks and, given that 2010 was the year of the Tea Party and anger at government was at record levels, a public safety millage would not have been a wise choice.

The Committee came to a compromise and it recommended a 5.4522 millage in the City's operating millage, known as a Headlee Override. This new millage would be tacked on to the 14.5448 residents were already paying to put their operating millage at 20 mils—the maximum amount allowed under state law. The money raised could technically be used for anything that came out of the general fund—from police and fire to pots and flowers for the downtown. There was nothing legally stopping the City Council from appropriating the money in any way they saw fit—though City leaders vowed to use the money for police and fire, an assertion that many residents would dismiss and would help fuel the coming political battle over the millage.

After voting to accept the Committee's recommendation, City Council placed the millage on the May 2011 ballot and two opposing groups quickly formed to support and to oppose the millage. The pro-millage group, Yes to Ferndale's Future (YTFF) was co-chaired by Greg Pawlica—a former City Council candidate—and Dennis Whittie, a local police officer. Sean House, a local conservative activist, spear-headed the opposition with his group Ferndale Against Council's Tax (F.A.C.T). Both groups collected money from residents and concerned parties with YTFF campaign collecting \$1456 from the Ferndale Police and Fire Department unions and FACT raising a total of \$2150 from residents and business owners Finance ("Campaign finance," 2011).

Both campaigns waged a spirited contest and held community events for residents to learn more about the millage and whether they should vote for it or not. There was even a debate put on between the two groups. In the end, the millage passed with 54% (1848 votes) to 46% (1650 votes).

Problem Statement

But while the millage passed and helped stabilize the city's finances for its duration—five years—it provoked a passionate response from the citizens and raised fundamental questions: What is government? And what do the citizens expect and want from it? What price are they willing to pay for it? If they aren't willing to pay, how far will they go in cutting it? What implications does that have for quality of life? What are the individual life situations that affect how one votes on essential matters of public safety? How does economic fear and mistrust of government manifest itself? How can government provide essential services in a climate of reduced funding for government? These questions fall along two modes of questioning, the emotional and the pragmatic.

The questions of public safety are core to what we expect from our government and combined with questions about what we will contribute to it make them highly emotional topics. They are also very pragmatic. Somehow the police have to show up and have the equipment to do their job, just as someone has to pay for the textbooks in the classroom. In short, how do communities make these choices? What are the factors involved in this process? What follows are interviews with residents, city leaders and public safety officials that give insight into these questions and help provide a way forward—a way past the rhetoric and sound bites—a view into

the soul of a city. The literature review below will show how limited our understanding of these issues is.

Literature Review

My research is novel because other researchers have not framed this situation in the way that I have, nor have many attempted to understand it using the mixed and qualitative methods that I have. This problem, I suppose, is not for lack of interest in the topic among researchers, but, rather, that these phenomena are so new and no one appears to have tackled them in the way that I have tried to. These issues are well-known to most reasonably-informed people, who read the newspaper or have watched their hometown police and fire forces slashed. But still there is a gap of academic understanding of the problem, and, thus, the following literature can only give a partial—though extremely important—primer on the events I analyze

Shrinking monetary support for lower-levels of government from higher-levels is a troubling, though not entirely new phenomenon. The arc of 20th century of American government began with ever-increasing power of government and its continual centralization in the Federal government. The Great Depression of the 1930's and World War II firmly cemented the power of the Federal Government. The apex of Federal power occurred in the 1960's with the “Great Society Programs” of President Johnson. Large-scale federal programs were created to attack poverty, improve education and to expand the social welfare net, most notably with the creation of Medicare and Medicaid (Carr & Conte).

But the height of Federal power quickly faded as the Vietnam War, social unrest—with the civil rights movement and anti-busing protests—and a distrust of government—epitomized by the Watergate scandal—tore down the facade of the Great Society (Boydston, Cullather, Lewis, McGerr & Oakes, 2002). This repudiation of Federal power was seized upon by Ronald Reagan who made rolling back government the core of his presidency. Reagan set in motion a process known as **devolution**. This is a “devolution of power and authority from the federal government to the state and local governments...and represents a historic long-term realignment of American federalism” (Cole, Hissong & Arvidson, 1999, p. 99). Additionally, devolution spawned a **second order devolution**, with state governments ceding more authority and responsibility to local governments. For purposes of discussion, devolution and second order devolution will be considered equivalent.

Devolution is a broad term that encompasses a wide-range of actions, from the federal government getting out of directly paying for housing for the poor to consolidating grants. But the message is still the same: local government is the best government. Then-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich said: “we have to decentralize power out of Washington D.C., and disperse power. We want to decentralize power...that means it actually goes back to the people from whom it comes” (Cole, Hissong & Arvidson, 1999, p. 101). The message of devolution squared nicely with the political changes taking place in Washington D.C. when, a decade after the Reagan revolution, President Clinton and his Republican opponents in Congress agreed that the “era of Big Government is over” (Clinton 1996).

Devolution made for good politics at the national-level, but for local governments it was widely seen as a potential disaster for municipal finance. Consider that by 1977 almost 16% of local government revenue came from the federal government, by 1992—and 10 years of Republican presidents—that number had plummeted to 4.7% (Eisinger 1998). How was this 75% decrease in federal funding affecting local governments? Cole and others (1999) set out to find an answer to this question by surveying city administrators in American cities with over 100,000 residents and asked respondents how devolution affected their municipality.

The results were interesting, first, because it didn't show massive outrage at federal spending cuts and, second, it showed that local governments were becoming increasingly creative in their service delivery by collaborating with public-private partnerships and a pooling of municipal resources. Almost half the respondents (49.4%) said that devolution practices resulted in increased involvement of for-profit and non-profit organizations in such areas as social services. Almost 44.4% of respondents said that devolution was forcing more regional and inter-jurisdictional cooperation and collaboration. While the researchers noted that only a few respondents believed that devolution had been a positive development, most respondents did not feel that it had any significant impact on policy or services. The most interesting findings identified the new-found “flexibility” that municipalities found in devolution's wake: “Many respondents report greater flexibility, more collaboration, and more interaction with state officials” (Cole, Hissong & Arvidson, 1999, p. 105). Devolution created a new paradigm in municipal government, one where

Cities will be compelled to become more self-sufficient and to perform governance and service functions more efficiently...[devolution] places a premium on public management skills and discourages grand visions of social and racial reform. [New Public Leaders] will believe in reinvention, innovation, privatization, competition, strategic planning and productivity investments (1999 p. 106).

These comments showed that besides the important changes in the distribution and direction of public monies, more important was the psychological change taking place in local leaders. No longer were local mayors being judged on their ability to accomplish a social agenda as the big-city Mayors like Coleman Young and David Dinkins did in the 1970's-80's with racial equality. But rather municipalities were now referred to as "Municipal Corporations" a la a Fortune 500 company and the Mayor is the CEO. And this was what the citizens have come to expect. Like shareholders, citizens expected city hall to correctly spend their tax dollars on the things that they want (police, fire, schools, library, ect).

This new corporatization was explored by Peter Eisinger (1998) in *City Politics In An Era of Federal Devolution*. Like Cole and others (1999), Eisinger argued that the arc of municipal government has gone from promoting racial agendas and social equality to solid public management, because, as the money from Washington has dried up, "mayors must focus more and more on making the most of the resources they control" (1998 p. 309). The impetus towards competent financial management was all the more acute due to the fact that:

State governments did little to make up for the evaporation of federal monies for their municipalities. Reeling from the losses of federal aid that they themselves were

experiencing, especially with the end of state general revenue sharing in 1980, state government significantly reduced the rate of growth of aid to their local governments. Altogether, state aid to local governments as a proportion of local revenues decreased from 25.4% to 21.2% of local revenues between 1977 and 1992 (1998 p. 311).

These statistics showed how important it was for local governments to be well managed because:

Nothing in the patterns of federal aid in the 1990's suggests that city governments will be able to relax their habits of fiscal self-reliance; now [the] political reputation [of local leaders] and success increasingly rely on public management skills rather than on the ability to exercise moral suasion on matters of social policy or to promote a racial agenda (1998 p. 314).

(See Appendix C for more on how public management has changed governing in the Detroit area.)

It is clear that while local governments are receiving a freer hand to manage their affairs, they are struggling to make ends meet. As federal and state dollars continually decrease, municipalities are put in an ever-shrinking box: costs for maintaining services do not usually decrease, if anything, they usually increase each year, whether it is personnel costs or equipment costs. Additionally, cities are faced with residents who are increasingly hostile to higher taxes. Though somewhat misguided in their attempts to conflate federal fiscal ineptitude with that of local municipalities (because municipalities, by law, have to have balanced budgets, unlike the federal government), the Tea Party movement has certainly increased the stakes in municipal

governments. Local governments asking for modest tax increases for schools or the public library—things that were once unquestioningly supported in the past—now face fierce public outcry and administrators are forced to be ever-more frugal.

Squeezing every penny out of the tax rolls has opened up new discussions about sharing services across jurisdictional boundaries. While this certainly saves municipalities money—which many tax payers demand—many residents are not comfortable with critical services like public safety being privatized. This uncertainty is due to the “politics of place” where:

...in some places, particularly smaller, wealthier, suburban communities, residents may hold a belief that the services offered by their jurisdiction are the best available, and therefore seek to exclude non-residents from the benefits of that service. Police and fire services lend to a sense of community identity, as how safe one feels in his or her neighborhood is a direct consequence of the level and quality of public safety services available to local residents (Carr and LeRoux 2005, p. 2).

Carr and LeRoux (2005) sought to explain the factors that cause municipalities to cooperate or to not cooperate on public safety services. Studying 670 units of local government, from cities to villages and townships, the authors found that public safety services are the most politicized service a government provides. As mentioned earlier, residents tend to believe that their services are superior to any other and that sharing those services or receiving services from another jurisdiction would be unacceptable. This is an important bargaining chip for public safety workers, especially unionized ones. Why take contract concessions when the citizenry will be outraged at the city for laying off public safety workers? Job security is also maintained by

the aversion of the citizenry to share their services with another locality. In short, as Thompson and Elling (2000) found, “citizens are least supportive of government contracting for functions that involve coercion or social control” (As quoted in 2005, p. 2).

But while public opposition is a strong force against cooperation and contracting, the fiscal reality of limited funds is one of the key reason municipalities consider this course of action. This is especially acute in places, like Michigan, where there are legal limits on the amount of tax that can be levied. Michigan cities cannot raise property taxes faster than the rate of inflation, and often the cost for providing services increases faster than the rate of inflation. With shrinking revenue from the state and federal government, municipal leaders are hard-pressed to make ends meet.

Additionally, Carr and LeRoux (2005) found that cities:

...with minority and aging populations tend to be higher users of services, and among the first to feel the impact if these programs and services are cut or reduced in their community.... and [older voters] tend to be more politically aware consumers of services and may block cooperation attempts if they suspect a change in their service level or quality (p. 6).

This is particularly troubling for cities like Ferndale where older voters tend to vote more frequently than their younger cohorts and are deeply suspicious of anything that might cut their services. Perhaps the potentially drastic cuts to city services like EMS or the community center were the impetus for seniors to come out and support the Ferndale millage.

The financial pressure created by budget cuts also has a detrimental psychological effect on public employees. Since wide-spread lay-offs of local government officials—particularly public safety workers—is a relatively new, and troubling, phenomenon, there is little research in this area. But, a 2010 study by Summerlin, Oehme, Stern and Valentine found that Florida prison guards that had been through rounds of budget cuts, wage freezes, and layoffs reported significantly higher stress levels and incidents of officer-involved domestic violence:

The significantly higher reported levels of organizational stress in particular—especially those related to staff and resource shortages and attitudes about leadership—raise concerns about the relationship between organizational stress and reported drastic budget cuts, hiring freezes and layoffs (p. 762).

While the researchers did not find a direct, causal link between cuts and domestic violence, they argue that “increased stress and its collateral consequences may be a hidden cost of budget cuts—a consideration that should not be overlooked by policy makers” (Summerlin & Oehme, 2010). This finding is important because it provides a context to understanding the psychological effects experienced by Ferndale police officers after 25% of their department was laid off in 2010.

While it is clear that professional managers of cities and other local officials are increasingly in a financial bind, it is important to look at citizen behavior and what they expect out of their government and their leaders and the ways citizens participate in civil society. There is a large amount of research studying the psychological processes in citizens in this arena, and foremost among them is trust. The foundation of good governance in America is trust, and it is

enshrined in the Declaration of Independence with “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Trust is hard to define, but in the context of this research it means the citizens’ expectation that their leaders follow and enact the will of the people. Such a vague definition of trust matters to both citizens and elected officials because:

Trust in local government matters because it has important implications for local representation and governance. Political trust is useful for both constituents and legislators. On the constituency side, trust fosters political accountability by providing ill-informed citizens with a reasonable yet less cognitively-taxing strategy for sanctioning elected officials. Since government performance helps to shape public trust, citizens' trust heuristic can be a useful tool in the voting booth when they must decide whether to reward or punish incumbents.... Trust is also important for representatives because it provides them with leeway, the authority to exercise their own considered judgment (Rahn and Rudolph 2005, p. 552).

Rahn and Rudolph (2005) set out to study the variables, both individual and city-level, that foster trust in government by its citizens. The study involved surveys of 9,000 people living in 55 cities from Los Angeles to Fremont. The researchers measured political trust along four dimensions:

1. **Quality of policy outcomes**—“citizens expect governments to produce effective policy outcomes such as peace and economic prosperity.”

2. **Policy congruence**—are the goals and desire of government the same as those of the citizenry?
3. **Procedural considerations**—are government benefits equally distributed among the citizenry?
4. **Attributes of officeholders**—are officials competent?

Previous research (Chaney, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2000) on policy outcomes indicated citizens' trust in government increased when they were satisfied with their economic situation and when service delivery (police, fire, schools, and library) was acceptable. This was important because residents of Ferndale gave high marks to their city services and this was certainly an important factor in getting support for the millage and was a key issue in the debate ("Colbalt citizen satisfaction," 2009). If the citizenry was not pleased with the level of service provided by the city or they were unhappy with their economic situation, why should they trust the government with more of their hard-earned income? As will be explored later, many of those who opposed the millage admitted to being in bad economic shape and were also not thrilled with the level of service provided by the city—especially with regards to the public schools, which many anti-millage informants refused to send their children to.

Citrin (1974) and Easton (1975) found that political trust increases when voters felt their desires were being pursued and enacted by the government. Even though elections at the local level in Michigan are non-partisan, partisan politics certainly enter into the policy discussion and when voters felt that the perceived distance between what they wanted and what the political parties wanted increased, trust in government decreases, as cited in Rhan and Rudolph (2005).

Political trust increases when voters feel that the benefits of government are fairly distributed and the method of distribution is fair (Owen and Dennis, 2001; Tyler, 1994). Many times anger at government (federal, state and local) involves an attribution that someone else is getting something they don't deserve or didn't earn. This sentiment is frequently seen among some conservatives who believe that the federal government has become a welfare state that takes the money (taxes) of hard-working and responsible people and gives it to the lazy and irresponsible. Finally, political trust is directly related to the perception of official competency. When government is seen as professionally run and efficient, support for and trust of government increases (Durr, Gilmour & Wolbrecht, 1997, as cited in Rhan & Rudolph 2005.)

Using the above definitions of public/political trust, Rhan and Rudolph (2005) measured trust in relation to such city- wide variables as form of government (city manager/ council or mayor-council); economic inequality; racial composition of the city and level of political polarization and individual-level variables such as interpersonal trust. The researchers' results generally supported previous studies. Rhan and Rudolph (2005) found positive correlations between local political efficacy—the belief that a citizen can make a difference in the community; quality of life in the community; personal economic perceptions; interpersonal trust—the more willing to trust others, the more willing to trust government; trust in the national government. Negative correlation was found with owning a home; income inequality and ideological polarization.

As was previously discussed, political trust is an important component of good, democratic governance, but increasing public trust can be difficult. It takes many years to build a worthwhile reputation but only one incident to destroy any credibility with the residents.

One way to increase trust is to involve citizens in appointed volunteer boards. Citizens are appointed by a city (usually City Council) and volunteer their time to studying an issue and advising the elected officials on their findings. These boards have a long history in American governance—dating back to the Boston Tea Party of 1773—but have taken on a new urgency since the end of the 20th century. After the Watergate scandal, public trust in government dropped and cynicism was rampant. Knowing that active citizen participation is key not just for the democratic process to work, but to grant legitimacy to the government, cities began appointing citizen advisory boards to provide direct citizen participation.

While these boards are fairly common in the U.S., research on their effectiveness is not. Dougherty and Easton (2011) conducted an investigation into the effectiveness of these boards with a study of southwestern Pennsylvania municipalities. The researchers found that boards were widely used (about 75% of cities utilized them), but that they were often unfilled, and when they were filled, members tended not to be representative of the community as a whole. Additionally, members rarely received any training for their role and there were no universal criteria for serving.

But while the effectiveness boards maybe questionable, they serve an extremely important psychological role: showing citizens that they can have an impact in their community: “increased participation makes democracy more democratic” (Dougherty and Easton 2011, p.

523). According to Rahn and Randolph (2005) this political efficacy increases trust in local government: “appointed public volunteer boards have the potential advantages of allowing more citizens to participate in policy making, increasing representation among disenfranchised groups, resolved conflict in less political settings, leveraging community expertise, and *increasing the credibility of government decisions*” (2011, p. 523).

In the next portion I will show how I have attempted to resolve the weaknesses of prior research and how I have attempted to create a better picture of the citizen-government dynamic in times of fiscal crisis.

Methodology

This research was based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with informants and on a small-sample survey of Ferndale Police officers. Participants included the former City Manager, a City Councilman, a Ferndale Police Officer, the leader of the pro-tax group, a husband and wife couple active in conservative politics, and a conservative working mother searching for a way to express her disappointment with city governance. Interviews were conducted in two phases: the first phase was an exploring interview where I learned about the informant, his or her views on the topics I was interested in and what place the informant’s comments would play in my research.

These initial interviews were not recorded and were “off- the record.” I conducted more first phase interviews, approximately 10, than I did in follow-up, recorded interviews. These follow-up interviews were structured around five to ten prepared questions and the chance for

follow ups. The questions ranged from very specific—regarding one's thought on a particular event, to a certain “cross-fire” style where informants were asked to comment on the thoughts of other informants.

In addition to the interviews, there was an anonymous survey of Ferndale Police officers. The sample was an extremely small sample size, with approximately nine respondents—approximately 20% of the department. While this sample is too small to have an accurate statistical analysis, the results quantified a lot of the data already collected in interviews. Questions were Likert scales of agree/disagree and essay response. Questions probed areas such as job satisfaction, perceived citizen support and views on officer safety. (See Appendix D for the survey questions.)

Before delving into the content of my results, it is important to introduce my informants and provide some background so that their opinions can be put into a useful context. Among those who considered themselves as politically and or economically conservative were Kathy Berryman, Tiffany and Tom Gagne. Mrs. Berryman was a working mother who worked for General Electric. She has lived in all four quadrants of Ferndale for over 16 years and saw the city grow from a bedroom community into a nightlife hot spot. She endured painful cut backs at GE and her husband was laid off from his job and she recently survived Thyroid cancer. They struggled to balance the mortgage, private schools and day care on a shrinking income. She had little formal involvement in Ferndale politics until the millage issue came up, when she wrote an Op-Ed piece in a local paper against it. Mr. and Mrs. Gagne were both long-time residents who have been active in the political scene for some time—she was a library board member, and he has run for Mayor and City Council. Both described themselves as fiscally conservative, and

both Gagnes were against the millage until Tom, decided to come out and publicly support it—a household division that was covered in the local media (Laitner, 2011).

Among the pro-millage informants was Dennis Whittie, a life-long Ferndale resident who was a member of the Citizen's Financial Planning committee and was an eventual co-chair of the “Say Yes to Ferndale campaign.” Mr. Whittie has been a police officer for more than 10 years in a nearby city and was laid-off from his department for some time due to budget problems. In his role as co-chair he campaigned for the millage and held teach-ins where residents could come in and learn about the millage and how it would affect their property taxes.

Representing the city administration were Councilman Scott Galloway and former City Manager Mark Wollenweber. Councilman Galloway was a native of Ferndale and has served on the City Council since 2000. He is a real estate attorney and was a vocal proponent of the millage. Mr. Wollenweber was the interim City Manager throughout 2011 and managed the city during the millage campaign. He had 30 years in municipal management and managed many cities throughout his career.

While these informants agreed to speak “on the record,” I decided that, in the interest of candor, I assured the representative of the police department that he would not be quoted by name or reveal any information that would compromise his anonymity. His comments will be quoted as “Police Officer,” “police informant” or simply, “informant.” This officer was experienced and was knowledgeable about the situation in Ferndale regarding the internal dynamics of the department and opinions of other officers regarding the layoffs and the millage.

The next section shows the results of my interview and survey and the themes that data was grouped in.

Results

This section describes the four “themes” of my research and reports the results of interviews and survey data along these themes,

Data from interviews and the survey were grouped into four “themes” that encompassed a wide-range of attitudes, beliefs and attributions regarding participants’ views on governance in Ferndale. These themes are:

1. **Trust**—trusting government to do right and the ability of public officials to count on support from the community.
2. **Hopelessness/frustration**—the emotive fears aroused by loss and downward-mobility and frustration and anger directed towards city officials.
3. **Mechanics of Governance**—the “grey” practical reality of having to do more with fewer resources and support.
4. **Identity Retention**—an aspiration of what Ferndale confronted by the fear that further cuts in government services would dissolve the “soul” of the city.

These themes were not exclusive to one group of informants. Rather, informants that had opposing beliefs and agendas still expressed the same thoughts and feelings that were codified in the four themes. This is very important because, while the national political discourse has created

a false dichotomy of diametrically-opposed enemies, the truth is, on the human-level, all participants felt the same things and expressed the same frustrations, regardless of their own agenda or views—an important, humanizing, component to any analysis of the players in local governance.

Trust

The first major theme of my research was *trust* –trust between government and its citizens and within government. Issues of trust were some of the most salient and universal themes throughout all my research. Among the informants who were politically conservative and were against the millage, issues of trust were among the most frequently cited reasons why they were against the millage. These informants simply did not trust the City on two levels, first they the city would do right with their money and believed that the City's old habits of “tax and spend” would amount to throwing good money after bad; second, they believed that the leaders of the city had colluded with one another to waste tax payers money and to tune out any opposition.

Kathy Berryman's distrust of the city government was rooted in a larger distrust of government in general and a belief that government employees were not subject to the same economic forces as she was:

I never trust government to manage our money, that's why we have a multi-trillion dollar deficit because no one is better with your money in theory, than you are, if you know what you're doing with money, you know how much money is in your money, how much

is your bank account. You know these things because it's your money. You control it. When it's out of your hands, the stewardship kinda changes (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

When asked if she thought the cut backs and layoffs that the city had gone through were a sufficient sacrifice she said:

It wasn't enough, it was too little and not enough, but unfortunately they already got the money they needed to keep the wheels on the bus. But the frustrating thing for me, is.. I had thyroid cancer, and my husband was laid off. We had to make a lot of changes in our household. My company, General Electric, the largest company in the world, they decided to say 'look, you're premiums are going to up' and they went up exponentially, \$13,000 we pay for health insurance. I have to write a check for \$13,000 and... That's a lot of money... and I think everybody should [take cuts] and that's part of the issue to and you have this union dynamic that is so blinded to paying into retirement fund and paying more for your prescription drugs and your co-pays, that's what's going on in the free market (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

For the Gagnes their mistrust of the City Council was rooted the belief that there was ideological rigidity amongst the leaders who practiced a "liberal group think" that discounted opposing opinions:

Tiffany: Politicians are politicians no matter where you go, but I wish they [City Council] wouldn't all just agree with each other all the time. As long as there are no conversations,

as long as they all think alike and they don't argue or have a different viewpoint on any issue, they'll never have our trust—because there's no issue that gets examined, dissected, discussed or anything. It's like 'hey guys you want to spend \$900,000 on a new ladder truck? Sure, that's a great idea!' (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

This questioning of the City Council's uncritical mentality led the Gagnes to question the legitimacy of the Citizens Financial Planning Committee. From the literature review, we know that citizen panels can help increase civic participation and increase trust in government. Not for the Gagnes. To them, the committee was the fruit of the poisoned tree, says Tom:

It's all a big exercise in confirmation bias, people are just looking for people who agree with them to confirm what their biases are... and they [City Council] found, easily, citizens [to serve on the committee] that believed what they thought. They went down all the traveled paths that City Council would expect them to go. So they got to the ends through the means, that City Council would have expected them to do. The same things, the same paths, the same justifications for what a city is, if you read the financial planning report, the touchy-feely, emotional, on-your-sleeves stuff was written for what a city is, is exactly what they [council] were hoping for (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

Furthermore, Tom questioned the selection process of how citizens were chosen for the Committee:

The council did a very curious thing. They claimed that, because each of the residents was geographically spread out across the precincts, represented the entire community. But geography doesn't change the way people think or what their politics are. You can find Democrats in every precinct in Ferndale, which is basically what they [City Council] did. They found people who think like them in every precinct of Ferndale. So that, you hear people say: 'it's a diverse collection of people' but there's no diversity there because most of them all thought alike. The only thing that was diverse was the fact that they found Democrats in every precinct; a blind squirrel could find Democrats in every precinct in Ferndale (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

Combining their distrust of leaders' thought process with that of the Financial Planning Committee, led Tom and Tiffany to a broader distrust of the city—a belief in a benign cronyism:

Tiffany: I think this community is going to be like this forever. I think it's been like this forever. There are the Good 'Ole Boys. I think in small communities, it gets like that.

Tom: It's funny, the Good 'Ole Boys never think of themselves as the Good Ole Boys. Ferndale has a new Good Ole Boy network and they still think that they're still battling against the good ole boys when they don't realize that they've become the good ole boys.

Tiffany: Or they say that the good ole boys are gone, 'we're the new council.'

Tom: 'we're the new blood, we're the new good blood.' It's just really interesting. People put together, when you become the majority, or majority controllers with your network or

group. People don't realize that they've become the good 'ole boys (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

Dennis Whittie, who served on the Citizen's Financial Planning Committee, disagreed with the assertion that the committee was a bastion of City Council-approved liberalism:

Well since I was on it [the committee], I definitely don't think we were all just a bunch of tax and spend liberals by any means. We looked at things, at first, from the perspective of 'how do we do this without a millage increase? How do we cut our way?' But what we realized was that we can't cut our way to prosperity... [The committee] created an independent source, versus just the City Council [informing the citizenry]. We sat down, we were people of differing opinions, backgrounds, each of us had our different specialties...But basically, I think keeping it [the committee] independent of City Council helped keep the 'I'm a politician, I want to raise your taxes because I need it' out of it (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

Additionally, according to Dennis, the recommendations that the committee came up with were not the knee-jerk conclusions that some believed the City Council expected them to come up with: "There's a lot of compromises [in the Committee's final report to Council], it wasn't just 'oh, this is the report, we'll just all agree.' There are things in that report that I pretty much succumbed to the majority on... But anybody who was there would understand that wasn't it [that the Committee] was just doing Council's bidding... Understandably, we were City Council appointees. But at the same time, if they [those who were critical of the committee] had

sat in on the meetings, they would see it was definitely not a rubber stamp” (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

For City Manager Mark Wollenweber, addressing the negativity and distrust of the city government was an important part of leadership:

Now there's some [residents] you're never going to convince. But that doesn't mean you stop giving out information or you stop trying to provide factual information. There are some that are so caught up the in the 'I'm-never-going-to-be-supportive, I don't trust a thing the city does.' Okay, you're not going to win those people over. Doesn't mean you stop trying, but you still continue to put out the best information you know [to be correct] (M. Wollenweber, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

For him, the Citizen's Committee was an excellent way for the City to provide information to the residents:

The citizen's committee was very important in terms of building support among the people who aren't connected to the government, who didn't understand the budget and [the] hardest thing to understand is that municipal government doesn't function the same [way] as your personal budget (M. Wollenweber, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

Despite his commitment to transparency, Mark still lamented the overall engagement of the citizenry:

Most people are afraid to go and complain [about issues that upset them] and you'll see this often during public participation that they're very reluctant to speak and I think TV—when you broadcast City Council meetings—there's always a toss up between informing the public, letting them see government in action [but] you get the people that are, unless they're so mad—and I've seen this happen—they come down to the City Hall in their pajamas at the end of the meeting saying: 'I heard you guys are gonna do such and such' and they're all upset about it. But the great majority of people may be upset about it [an issue], but they're not gonna go down [to City Hall], and they're reluctant to speak in public. So [there are the positives] of having transparent government, which is very important to building confidence of citizens [but there is the trade off] of 'I don't want to say anything, I'm afraid, they know where I live (M. Wollenweber, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

The City's police officers were caught between budget cuts and City leaders trying to win the confidence and trust of voters for a tax. Based on the survey of police officers and the interviews with my police informant, it was quite clear the department felt inadvertently caught in the middle of this maelstrom. According to the results, surveyed officers did not believe that the City administration supported them. Using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree)-5 (strongly agree), the average response was a 1.5 to the statement: "City Administration supported the department."

When asked to think about the same question (City Administration supported the department) after the millage passed, the average response increased slightly to 1.75—six officers disagreed and two strongly disagreed. But while they didn't feel supported by the department, it was clear that they felt supported by the residents of Ferndale: the average response to “the residents of Ferndale trusted their police department” was 4.13, with five officers agreeing, two strongly agreeing and one having no opinion. Additionally, surveyed officers believed that engaging and educating the community about law enforcement's role in the community was important: average response of 3.87, with three officers agreeing, three strongly agreeing and two disagreeing, was given to the statement of “it is important that the police are involved in community politics so that we can explain the importance of our jobs to residents.” Even more interesting was that officers believed it was important that “residents know we weren't the cause of the city's financial crisis” (Survey).

The results of the survey, especially about the lack of trust between City Hall and the police department are strongly supported by the experiences of my police informant. When asked whether officers had a voice in the budget talks and layoffs, he said:

...I don't think we had much of a say at all because of, everything resided in the hands of City Council and we definitely had the opinion that whatever they wanted to do they were going to do it and we knocked on doors, we talked to City Council and it didn't seem like they wanted to listen and it was a just a matter of numbers and it just came down to ‘you either do this or we do this’ and we didn't have a say (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011)

This animosity appeared to be deep seated over the layoffs of police officers:

It came down to three days before they were going to layoff 4 or 5 of us [police officers] and then the next thing it's, 'no we're laying off 10.' A couple days before the layoffs, 10 people were gone. That's six other people that had no clue [that they'd be laid off]. They were like 'okay we made it', but the next day they [city] was like 'no' because there were political differences. Like huge issues and they're like: 'nope, we're laying-off 10.' So, there was a lot more than just money. Money was a very small fraction of it.

Interviewer: So, do you think it was spiteful on the part of city hall?

Informant: From my opinion, from what we saw, absolutely.

Interviewer: Why?

Informant: Just a history of who's in charge and they didn't get along.

Interviewer: Was it like your management did not mesh with city hall management?

Informant: Yep, absolutely. And just over the years it finally blew, and they [city hall] realized that they had a chance to knock them [police department] down a peg or two. Look where the city went—they went from the police chief having a third say in how the city was ran, meaning he ran the police while the city manager wasn't in charge [of the police department]—and City Council was like 'this shouldn't be right, we're the only city in the state that [operates like this] and that's not fair' (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

This animosity between the Department and City Hall came to a boil during contract negotiations with the police union. The union offered the City some cost-saving concessions such as 12 hour shifts and a dedicated ticket-writing detail. But the City used the offer as a “bargaining chip” against the union: “[City Hall] knew we wanted it, but it saved the city massive amounts of money. And they used it as 'hey, if they're good, we'll give it to them.' They realized that it would save them a ton of money. It was a huge savings” (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

In response some officers slowed down the amount of tickets they wrote in protest:

Informant: Guys weren't happy. Nobody was writing tickets, nobody knew we could hurt the city [by not writing tickets and depriving the city of those funds]. I mean it worked. And, a good four months nobody wrote tickets until the court said 'we're losing money big time and we need something done.' Actually, there was an all-city meeting for the officers and Hazel Park [police] had to cover the city while we had this meeting—that's how bad it was, we knew we were pinching them [city hall].

Interviewer: So what was said in this meeting?

Informant: Just 'hey you guys need to start doing this [writing tickets] because if not, they're going to lay off more people' (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

While it would be very difficult for all participants to trust each other all the time, the above data sheds some startling light on the difficult process of effectively governing a

community. For those, like the Gagnes, who were opposed to the City's plans, there was a profound sense of alienation between them and their leaders—a sense that those in power were colluding with one another without seriously considering opposing viewpoints. To them the City—in putting up the front of “community involvement”—was selectively choosing residents who would agree with them. They felt that any more tax dollars would be just be throwing good money after bad. For the police, the historic friction with City Hall fostered an environment of distrust where they believed they were arbitrarily punished with layoffs and started a slowdown because of this. The City administration felt they were reaching out to the citizenry, to be transparent, to give them an opportunity to be heard—but too often that decreased participation because of a fear of retribution.

Hopelessness and Frustration

Combined with the sense of ideological alienation and cultural chasm with City Hall that many residents and police officials felt, the acute and overpowering financial forces of the great recession made a bad situation even worse. For those who opposed the millage, many had been personally affected by the recession (loss of employment, 401k value, increasing costs, etc.) and they had a persistent negativity, and a sense of hopelessness and frustration emerged. This negativity afflicted some of these informants like a chronic disease—always at the margins of every thought, weighing in on every decision. For some City Leaders and those attempting to pass the Millage, there was sympathy for the financial plight of residents, but also an attempt to brush off criticism as partly an outgrowth of misdirected anger and frustration formed by conservative pundits like Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reiley.

For Kathy Berryman, a sense of frustration and exhaustion with city policies and priorities had pushed her to a tipping point:

So it's very frustrating because we are stuck. We are the 1%.... we're also the people that are paying the burden of the income of the property taxes. The reason why we opposed the millage increase was resale ability of the house and, frankly, the value you get for the millage. Basic city services are: garbage, police, and fire. To me that's basic city services. But I don't [think] it's fair for us to pay more than our neighbors next door for it just because they've lived here longer. We've invested four times more than they've invested in their home and they've lived here for over 20 years. So since we've invested more why should we pay more for it? (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

Her anger at the fairness of her tax burden fueled a larger anxiety about her and her family's future in Ferndale:

Because his [her husband] full time job was looking for a full-time job, and you're scared because, again I don't know, GE [her employer] was slashing their headcount, and I've could have easily been tapped too, and with both of us out of work with a \$10,000 property tax bill?...It's tough.... My fear was, we're scared because, again, we're stuck. We're fucking stuck. This is how we're stuck: nice-sized house, we don't know the quality of the neighborhood, it's going to continue to go down as there's the house three doors down is in foreclosure...I am worried about being here, long term. I'm worried about the burden of the city, they're spending money they don't have (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

Adding to her frustration was a sense of losing control:

The only thing we couldn't control are, the people around us and the decisions they make.... it's scary to me because I am literally stuck here. I'm stuck here no matter what happens around me, I'm stuck no matter what happens at City Hall, I'm stuck whether the police show up or not, I'm stuck whether people come north from 8 mile [from Detroit]. I'm stuck. So emotionally, I'm scared, because I can't control any of this (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

Finally, this led to a sense of exhaustion and general hopelessness:

I used to believe that my voice could make difference; I just don't think it matters. I really feel very helpless about it... It's frustrating. It's so frustrating, and I wish I were more altruistic... I'm so stuck; I just don't want it to make me any more bitter than I already am (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

For police officers, the animosity from the layoffs and contract issues created an acute sense of frustration and hopelessness amongst the officers remaining on the force. According to my police informant, after the layoffs were “dictated” by City Hall,

We had a majority of people that didn't care—this is an older department—so there was only a small group of younger [officers] that it [the prospect of more layoffs] was really affecting. Everyone else wasn't affected so they weren't fighting tooth and nail, they're not going to give up benefits, [layoffs] don't affect them (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

Additionally, officers seemed to accept, especially those with the least chance of being laid-off, the animosity between City Hall and the department:

Over time you'd move on and you didn't care anymore, you're here to do your job. I think a lot of officers have lost the ambition for working for Ferndale [police], because [the mentality has gone from] 'I like working at Ferndale' to now 'it's just a job,' that's the biggest change (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

Furthermore, because it is so difficult to get hired as a police officer, many accepted this new negativity:

I would say probably 90% of the people [believed the new negativity] because they had been here so long and there's no alternative in this department. There are guys that have been here 36 years, guys that have been patrol officers for 29 years; they're not leaving, because they can't. They don't have the money in their 401k. You have guys that this [job] is all they've known in their life. They don't have the ability to go somewhere else and they're not going to get hired at another department at age 45. That's just not going to happen (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

Additionally, there was a sense that the residents and visitors to Ferndale were clueless about how the department was still providing the same level of service; with fewer officers and that the City leadership wanted it to stay like that:

I definitely think it was, the citizens had no idea, because they didn't know and they were just not given the information. I think if key leaders would have made it apparent, as well as the city, the City Council or whoever, look at this statement 'we're not going to do anymore' and that would be it and the city services would change then people would notice things stop, people would have known. But key leaders didn't want to change anything, it was business as usual. They had no idea. They had no idea that we did everything exactly the way we would have had we had every single person [back from layoffs] (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

But while the citizens may not have known the full extent of the changes in the department, and fewer officers per shift, there was a larger than normal fear for officers' safety:

Informant: You know what, you just got used to it [less officers per shift]. It was like that, it was busy, but it depends on the season. They [the layoffs] hit us at a very bad time, it was summer. Middle of summer, June 30th we lose 10 guys. And it's like going into a holiday weekend and you lose 10 guys, and it's July 4th the following week? That was huge. But things died down and it's winter and you get used to it. So it's just, you don't think about it.

Interviewer: Were most guys concerned about that, knowing that backup might not be there?

Informant: Yeah because everyone was taking calls, and we documented all that stuff.

Interviewer: Were those concerns made known to the city leadership?

Informant: Oh yeah, it was sent to City Council

Interviewer: Was that ever acted on?

Informant: No idea. That was [between] the union board, council and the chief. Not us [patrolmen]

Interviewer: But the [safety issue] was an extra stressor for a lot of guys to an already stressful job?

Informant: Mhm

(Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

These safety concerns did manifest themselves in the survey data of officers: an average score of 3.9—three strongly agreed, three agreed, and two disagreed—was reported for “after the June 2010 layoffs I felt less safe on patrol because of reduced man power.” This number did go down to 3.4 when officers were asked the same question—with four agreeing, one strongly agreeing and three disagreeing. But after the Millage had passed, which shows some change in perception, even though no additional officers came back after its passage.

Police work is already an inherently stressful job—“Any day of the week I could be in my car and I could get smoked by a drunk [driver], I can get shot at, whatever it could be, you have no idea” (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011) and most police officers accept this, but what was troubling to many officers was not the physical threats faced on the job, but the more “mundane” issues like time off and the bigger issue of job security.

According to the survey data, almost every officer (average score 4.9) agreed that since the layoffs “it has been harder to get time off or vacation time because of decreased staffing.” On top of these micro stressors was the uncertainty about job security:

You became a cop because you knew that it was a good job that paid and it was secure—it was like working at Ford or GM, you get in and you’re good... [but] am I secure here? No. I don’t feel that. Do I have a union? Yeah, but I don’t trust the union either because, I’ve seen how they operate, or I don’t trust them... But security-wise, who’s going to know what’s going to happen next year (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

For those citizens who campaigned for the millage, the first step in courting support for the millage was acknowledging that it would be difficult to ask people for more tax money in a depressed economy, and Dennis Whittie, the co-chair of Say Yes To Ferndale, knew this:

I think [this millage] was more based on money, 'I can't afford it, I don't have a job, therefore I can't support this.' I think if people had the money there wouldn't have been a close question [opposition to the millage]... [This millage was a question of money] and it was a totally legitimate position and I've said that and people who voted 'no' [because of money issues] that's a completely legitimate position. People are losing their houses, their job prospects look like garbage. I never thought 'well if you voted no then you're awful.' or something like that. I completely understand why they would (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

Councilman Scott Galloway agreed with the assessment that this election was driven by economics but argued that residents were still seeing a drop in the amount of money they paid in taxes with this millage's passage:

[There were] a lot of reasons people got involved in the 'no campaign,' and it was something that those of us who supported the millage, or the Headlee override, attempted to address. Essentially, the way it was addressed, and I think the proper way to look at it, even with the millage, even with a Headlee Override, your taxes are likely to go down and you're going to be enjoying the same level of services you always had (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

But there was a larger driver of the opposition's anger and frustration, according to Councilman Galloway, than just economics:

Interviewer: Do you think there's a tendency amongst people—who are anti-tax, or who opposed this millage—to take some of the narrative from the 'red vs. blue, Democrat vs. Republican' from the national political debate of 'there's waste in government, in the Federal government, you know, why do we spend money on x, y, and z?' Is there a tendency amongst some people to take that kind of argument and mentality and apply it to something to the City of Ferndale, local government?

Councilman Galloway: I think that's exactly what was going on in the Ferndale millage. We had people who sat around all day watching Fox News and Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reiley, told them that in general there's government waste and that people who work

for government are losers, incompetent and can't do anything right and these people sit all day long, feeling sorry for themselves about their own situation or their circumstances. Others have a deep-seated hatred for municipalities, for governments, for working people. They took that out on, they vented those concerns and angers through the millage process and I think there's really nothing more to their complaints or their concerns other than parroting stuff they hear on Fox News and conservative talk shows. Had they actually done any research into what was going in Ferndale's budget, there's no way they could have reached these conclusions and made the statements that they did in good faith. It was simply parroting what they heard or bringing their own financial situation, speaking about their own financial situation and projecting their views about their finances and their future prospects on to the city's budget situation (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

With regards to the relationship between City Hall and the Police Department, Councilman Galloway believed that, since public safety employees had never been laid-off —“a complete non-starter”—there was a sense of entitlement amongst these workers that they were a “sacred cow.” Given that mentality, some of the frustration and anger in the police department was an outgrowth of being on the chopping block for budget cuts. Councilman Galloway believed the department tried to enlist citizen backlash but failed:

I think both police and fire unions had the anticipation that there was going to be widespread and deep citizen outrage at the budget cuts to their departments, but the fire department and the police department, I should say the fire and police union, actively

courted and tried to ferment that type of outrage and they completely failed at their attempt (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

As citizens that opposed the millage, like Kathy Berryman, couched their reasoning in terms of helplessness and frustration at their inability to change things and their own personal and financial situation, City leaders like Councilman Galloway understood, but believed that a larger force of political rhetoric from conservative pundits was really driving the opposition. For police officers like my informant, frustration was borne out of having to accept cuts in personnel and compensation but still having to do the same job with even fewer resources and not having an equal say in the events that transpired. In response, City leaders like Councilman Galloway believed that that frustration was merely an outgrowth of finally being exposed to the budget cuts and reductions that everyone else had been experiencing.

Mechanics and Realities of Governance

The residents of Ferndale and city employees, like police officers, were understandably upset, frustrated with their economic circumstances and distrustful of their leaders. These were micro-level concerns that were being driven by larger, macro forces. As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, devolution has created both unprecedented freedom for local governments but has also created unprecedented financial strain as communities, such as Ferndale, struggle. What follows are views of my informants on the day-to-day realities of running a municipal government and their interpretations of the budget cuts. For Councilman Galloway and City Manager Wollenweber, the rounds of layoffs, cuts and a tax increase were all part of an informed attempt at turning the City's financial situation around. For police officials,

the layoffs of police were not necessary and were done to cover for poor past policy priorities. For anti-millage folks, like the Gagnes, there was a pointed skepticism about the City's claims of efficient fiscal management.

Councilman Galloway believed that the City was well-run and responsibly managed, but the revenue crisis was not the City's doing:

The city of Ferndale is one of the best financially managed cities in the State of Michigan as recognized by the State Treasury... Ferndale has been working towards fiscal sustainability as long as I've been on council... departments have been merged, eliminated, downsized, spun off, everything a city can reasonably be expected to do to keep their financial house in order has been done by the city of Ferndale and people who indicate that there's some level of incompetence, frankly, don't know what they're talking about and aren't familiar with how municipal budgets works or the challenges facing a city like Ferndale (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

Those who believed that the City was mismanaged, according to the Councilman, had not been paying attention to the historical forces that were shaping the realities of governance:

[The most vocal opponents of the millage] were willfully ignorant of how a city budget operates. The city had dozens of presentations on the challenges of the city budget with declining revenues, due to broken promises by the State of Michigan and due to the declining property values within the City. This was the most belabored issue I've ever

seen on my 10 years on City Council. There's no way, and all the budgets were online and we had a citizen's panel put in place to study the issue and they largely agreed with the city administration and elected officials. And it's not a matter of incompetence. It's not a matter by the city. It's not a matter of the information being difficult to get at. It's, for those who claim that the city was incompetent in some way, it was either a willful ignorance of the facts or a political axe to grind (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

Furthermore, the Councilman argued that despite the declining revenues and the increasing challenges, the City still provided the level of services to residents: "I think the best indicator of Ferndale's success in managing their finances, is that, despite making significant cuts internally, that service levels haven't decreased, so whether it's in any of our major departments, we've been successful in keeping service levels at or near what the citizens have come to expect." But this couldn't last forever without new revenue: "eventually you get to the point where you can't maintain those [doing more with less] anymore and we took steps ahead of significant problems propping up by reducing the hours at city hall, cross-training, and just, in some instances, eliminating some programs and had we not been fortunate enough to pass the millage, more visible cuts would have taken place" (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

While many cried foul at the prospect of losing police and fire and still having to pay more in property taxes, first responders could no longer be immune from cuts:

The reality of the city of Ferndale, and I suspect most municipalities in Michigan, is that the vast majority, well over 50% of the general fund, is spent on police and fire with current payroll and legacy costs and health care and pensions the lion's share of any budget that we passed in any given year is police and fire. So police and fire, for the first 8 or 9 years of my time in office, and for the first 70 or 80 years of the city's history, has been almost held harmless in any sort of budget discussions or negotiations and so, to some, it may have seemed that we were singling out police and fire budgets, but the simple fact of the matter, is that we have an approximately \$18 million dollar budget and we had to take \$2 or \$3 or \$4 or \$5 million dollars out of that budget, there's no way you could do that without hitting the police the fire budgets (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

Former City Manager Mark Wollenweber agreed with the assessment that police and fire costs were the biggest expenditure for the City and he believed that the city had thoroughly considered and enacted all possible spending reductions before asking the residents for more money:

Well I think, going to the citizens [for money] isn't the last resort, but it's one of the last things you want to do and you have to have your house in order to do that. I think that the negative people who were opposed to the millage did a good job of misleading, either intentionally or unintentionally—because I don't know their mind—of focusing on negative things that stand out that would resonate with 'no' voters (M. Wollenweber, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

Despite the fact that it wasn't very popular to ask for more money, there was no other way around the issue:

I don't think there was any choice but to do what the citizen's committee came up with [go for the millage] But to put up a ballot question and to realistically say 'we're going to be two million [dollars short in the budget] out or whatever and that's 20 people that are gonna be gone', the bulk of those being in fire and police (M. Wollenweber, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

Even with the starkness of the revenue crisis painted so clearly, many were still unconvinced that the City had taken an appropriate course of action in dealing with the crisis. My police informant explained the skepticism of the millage:

I think a lot of those people, especially when you have officers that work here that [also] live in the city and they didn't want it [the millage] because they knew how the money was spent. Case in point, the city spent \$250,000 in these [street signs for downtown], that's two [police officer jobs], and you want to have signs? You want to have all these 'green' things. A green roof or a green air system [for City Hall] that costs like a half million, are you kidding me? That's retarded. It's stupid. That's what the citizens are mad about. It's like 'why are you spending money for all these things—they make us stand out and look nice, but aren't realistic?' (Police informant, personal communication, December 15, 2011).

This sentiment was supported by survey findings: with one officer agreeing and another strongly (average score 4.5) with the statement “cities like Ferndale are being forced into financial crisis by State and Federal government,” they still disagreed—five strongly disagreed, two disagreed and one had no opinion—with the statement “there was no more money in the city's budget, police officers had to be laid off.”

This sentiment of wasted money and misguided priorities was succinctly summed up by an anonymous police officer who wrote, in the short answer section of the survey, “The city has forever wasted money on needless programs. When this practice continued while the city cried poor, it opened my eyes that things will never change.”

For Tom and Tiffany Gagne, while they acknowledged that the City's revenue had dropped precipitously, they believed that the City—in heralding their fiscal restraint—was misleading the public:

Interviewer: A lot of the city leaders and administrators believed that the city had already done an appropriate level of belt tightening, be it, layoffs, concessions for pay and benefits, reducing manpower at city hall, things like that, they believed that they had done a responsible job, before asking the citizens for a tax increase. What do you think about that?

Tom: To a certain point they had to, I think they did because they had to balance the budget. But what's funny when you listen to the City Council they're like 'we balanced x number of budgets' Hey, hello folks, it's against the law not to balance the budget

Tiffany: you have to balance the budget

Tom: You have to balance it. You can't make virtue of necessity. And, being great politicians, they do a wonderful job making virtue of necessity and because, Ferndale has a lot of group think, everyone gives them credit for balancing the budget. Folks, this isn't the Federal government, they have to balance the budget (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

So while the City leaders believed that they were acting with due diligence in attacking the financial crisis and explaining the simple realities of governing with less to people, many were not convinced. For police officials, years of fiscal mismanagement and differing priorities were the true cause of the crisis and for residents like the Gagne's, City Hall was parading around basic requirements of governance as important achievements—making virtue out of necessity.

Preserving the Identity of Ferndale

While the millage was largely fought on grounds of fiscal responsibility and proper priorities, another front was also about preserving the identity and the quality of life in Ferndale. Most of the informants, like Dennis Whittie and Councilman Galloway, who argued for millage, also argued that the very identity of Ferndale was at stake with this millage, and that, somehow, the community's character was somehow intrinsically linked to the services that the City provided its residents. There was a profound sense of urgency in their mind about the necessity to keep City services high, lest they be cut any further and the city started a decline. For those

who opposed this millage, that argument did not hold much sway other than a cursory acknowledgement that city services were on par with their expectations.

Basically, what was at stake [during the Millage] was our identity as Ferndale. Ferndale has always been known as a very progressive community with excellent City services and a safe place to be and a thriving place for business to move into. By not passing the millage, in more of a broader sense rather than in nitty gritty details of each thing, what we would have seen would have impacted our image completely and impact our image of having less services, being less safe, would, again, trickle down into less economic activity such as a new business moving in and residents wanting to move in due to the excellent city services. So probably, in the broadest sense of the millage passing vs. not passing, it would have been our actual image and identity as Ferndale, we would not be Ferndale as we know it....So by passing this millage and in a broad sense, it actually saved Ferndale as we know it. The identity of Ferndale and what it stands for (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

Furthermore, according to Dennis, additional cuts to city services had the millage not passed, would have weakened the core of the downtown business community—the cultural and geographic center of the city: “so by not passing the millage... the effect would be businesses that would be thriving would probably go somewhere else, somewhere where public safety services were good.” An exodus of business capital, he said, would have moved the city back to the 1980's and 1990's when Ferndale was little more than a ghost town which, many speculated,

would be eventually consumed by the societal dysfunction and desolation of Detroit (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

But a vote for the millage was also a vote of support for city services in the neighborhoods: “I think most voters and not just voters but residents, in general, appreciate the services in Ferndale. I personally grew up here and I stay here because our services are great, unlike a lot of other cities I’ve looked at,” said Dennis, (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011). Councilman Galloway concurred:

Clearly. Yep. Absolutely, I think that's why it [the millage] won by 6%. That's why Ferndale has always chosen to invest, whether it's in our parks, schools, infrastructure, or, in this case, a Headlee Override millage. People in Ferndale get it. They value the services they receive. They value police and fire response times measured in seconds, rather in minutes or hours or days. They value a downtown that looks nice. They value responsive public works. When a water main breaks, it doesn't bubble out of the street for hours or days. Someone is on it within probably minutes. When trees come down we have crews out there cutting down city trees and moving them, sometimes, within minutes. Those are the things that make Ferndale, those are some the things that make Ferndale a great area to live, that's why people have chosen to live in a high-tax, high-service community. If you change that, you change the nature of Ferndale and make it a less desirable place (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

The community support for the millage overrode the existing economic fears and past budget cuts, according to Councilman Galloway: “And when your revenue source takes a nose-

dive as all the property values in Southeastern Michigan has, something has to give if you're going to keep those same level of service...the price of providing the services doesn't change, it only goes up. When revenue goes down, you have to either make up revenue or cut costs. And people in Ferndale clearly indicated that they didn't want to cut services and so they voted themselves a tax increase as the city historically has" (S. Galloway, personal communication, November 6, 2011).

For those opposed to the millage, these arguments didn't have the same traction: "I'm not going to move to Bloomfield Hills [a wealthy community North of Ferndale], like, if we leave here, I'm not going to move to Bloomfield Hills because they have a library and a community center," said Kathy Berryman, (K. Berryman, personal communication, November 1, 2011). Tom and Tiffany Gagne were willing to do without some services if it meant keeping taxes down. Here's what they said when asked if there was a point where cuts would be detrimental to the quality of life in Ferndale:

Tiffany: People have an interesting idea about what quality of life is. First of all, if you look at what the fire department does. Like 90% of their runs are medical, and of those, I'm pretty sure, 87% go to one or two buildings. So, you know what, is that really, so what we're paying the fire department for as an entire city, should the city, should all the resident be paying for nearly 90% of all the runs go to one or two buildings and have them all be medical? Why not just say 'you know what, it is the, their insurance, their Medicaid/Medicare, should pay for the ambulance service and we just not going to run there.' Our fire department is strictly for fires. I don't need the ambulances, all the

expenses that go along with those emergency services.' There are cities all throughout Michigan that live without those services. Now people say: 'our services are great' yeah, but, it's funny, when you've been in Ferndale so long, or you really haven't lived anywhere else, you don't know that the ambulances come any later in Clawson than it does in Ferndale or West Bloomfield or any other city that doesn't have ambulance service out of the fire department. They don't know. We live in a city that has two fire stations for a 4 square mile city, a lot of it has to do with the train tracks, [but] there are lots of other cities that have much further, where the fire department is much further away from them and yet they're still able to respond and put fires out, and we're only talking about a handful of fires a year.

Tom: There are lots of things that are quality of life issues, and people just assume, again, what [services] they have is some like kinda of high-water mark. The point is no, the water-mark can actually be a lot higher and it still could be lower and be tolerable. I'm okay with taking my garbage out in the morning and I really wish my neighbors would pick up their cans the same day. But some people leave them out for a few days (T. Gagne & T. Gagne, personal communication, October 16, 2011).

While it may be too late to restore some residents' trust in their government and the policy decisions they make, some, like Dennis Whittie, argue that it is equally true that there is a culture of debate and critical thinking woven into identity of Ferndale:

Ferndale always has good elections. We have pro and con, we're a community where everybody thinks about things, they all come to the table. What's unique about Ferndale, which I didn't see in other [cities], is the opposition. People do step up; people cared enough to actually do a campaign against and for the millage... [Ferndale] has a loyal opposition. And it's very good because the people on the opposition side, especially them, the meeting after the millage passed I remember me and Sean House [leader of FACT] both got up and said 'hey time to [work] together, what has happened is what has happened' and when it was done, I talked to friends I've known since I was a kid, who were in the opposition. I mean we're still neighbors in the end and that's the nice thing about Ferndale. We don't sit at the end of an election and say 'Well I dislike you so we're going to be really mean to each other' that doesn't happen in Ferndale. I just think everything that has happened with the millage and any election, in the end we come together. We're still neighbors in the end and that 'Good Neighbors' [Ferndale's city motto] is actually true (D. Whittie, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

The millage engendered a critical conversation about what the residents wanted their city to be and what they expected from it. For those in support of the millage, what services the city provided was directly linked to quality of the community: high-quality services begat high-quality, safe neighborhoods and a destination downtown. For those in opposition to millage, these were sham arguments. For them, "quality of life" was a highly-subjective term, and it would be silly to want to live in one place or another solely on the quality of services provided by the local government. But even with these opposing world views, there was still a sense that

both camps came out and waged a spirited, neighborly, contest for or against the millage—a result of Ferndale's “Good Neighbors” motto

Discussion

Americans are living in unprecedented times and my results raise many fundamental and important questions. These questions belie the emotional and pragmatic life of our communities. There is a debate raging about the government's proper role in society, and this debate is most often focused on the highest rungs of our government. Seldom is it turned to municipal government where the majority of services are provided and where the most contact between government and governed occurs. And while this project was constrained by its small-scale, the literature reviewed earlier generally supports the findings in my research, although it is important to remember that the literature imperfectly maps to the four themes, because the literature only partially describes the phenomena described in this research. The literature appropriately describes and analyzes the substantive issues of *trust* and the *mechanics of government*. Yet, there is a lack of literature on emotion—*hopelessness and frustration*—and how that relates to the community process of governing. Additionally there is a lack of literature on the aspirational aspects of this process—*preserving the identity of Ferndale*.

One of the main drivers of this research was the lack of faith or ***Trust*** that participants had towards the local government. Thomas Rudolph's (2005) found that the public trust was related to quality of 1. **policy outcomes**, 2. **policy congruence**, 3. **procedural** considerations and, 4. **attributes of officeholders**. All the anxieties, worries, and distrustfulness I witnessed were related, in some way, to these four attributes. First, those who opposed the millage were

generally opposed to the policy priorities of the City; informants like Kathy Berryman and the Ganges believed that the City had forever wasted money which created a drag on taxpayers and businesses. Additionally, since these informants believed that the city's policy outcomes were not benefiting them, they did not believe there was congruence between what they wanted out of the city government and what they received. Certainly, these informants were pleased or at least satisfied with the basic city services like police, fire and public works, but still they were upset about peripheral city expenses—signs in the downtown district and bike lanes—things that were publicly triumphed by the city leadership but didn't cost nearly as much as public safety. Spending on these “small” items, in their opinion, was indicative of a culture of wastefulness and spend-thrift ways.

Procedural considerations were very important in understanding the skepticism and opposition to the millage and how the public safety layoffs were handled. First, for the police, there was a belief that they had been arbitrarily laid-off, and that any attempts to negotiate cost-savings with the city outside of layoffs were dismissed. This action was seen as being the result of decades-long disagreement between City management and the police department over how certain operations should be performed. For citizens opposed to the millage members of the Citizen Financial Planning Committee were nothing more than yes-men for City Council—a charge that will be broken down shortly. Finally, the charges of mismanagement by the city were rooted in a belief that city leaders were not competent, that they lacked the skills to do their job. While those charges may be debatable—and this isn't the place to argue them—there was a profound disconnect between what some residents saw in their leaders and what leaders saw in themselves. Perhaps this disconnect will always be in governance—one certainly cannot please

everyone—but still attempts to bring in differing opinions and perspective is critical to not only building trust in institutions but, for a cohesive community.

The research done by Dougherty and Easton 2011 and Rahn and Randolph 2005 showed that there were benefits in having citizens serve on boards and advise on policy matters. The Citizens Financial Planning Committee was important in drumming support up for the millage and educating citizens. The criticisms of the panel, reflected by the Gagnes, are very valid and must be addressed—everyone who was nominated for the Committee identified as either a Democrat or an “independent”—and while it is true that most of the local officials in Ferndale are Democrats—from which we can infer that a majority of voters in the City vote Democratic—all voices must be represented at the table. While the Committee may have been ideologically “stacked,” their work was important, nonetheless— a group of citizens volunteering their time to study an issue and to make recommendations to City leaders and fellow citizens is a unique quirk of American government. Citizens' panels have been in use in Ferndale for a long time, and are an effective tool for drumming up citizen support. While critics say the panel is a rubber-stamp for City Council, it was still, nonetheless, instrumental in involving the community in the important process of taxing and expressing what citizens want out of their government.

With regard to *Hopelessness* and *Frustration* Summerlin, Oehme, Stern and Valentine's (2010) research focused on the detrimental psychological effects on police and correction officials in institutions that were undergoing budget cuts. While I did not find, nor was my research designed to find, causal links between officer behavior and the layoffs, my research did uncover a general negativity and pessimism about the surveyed police officers—from the

belief that City Hall did not support them, to the stress of not being able to get time off. And while there will always be employees complaining, I am confident that these attitudes are directly related to the layoffs and the ensuing stress these officers experienced. And since hopelessness and frustration stem from events and decisions one cannot control—like the economy or unemployment—this emotionality is projected onto—in this case, the local government—things that aren't the cause of this frustration—the City Council has as much control over the rise and fall of revenues as the police officer does on the variability of crime. But blaming City leaders for one's personal economic struggles is a convenient bias that helps alleviate the stress of being hopeless and frustrated.

The *Mechanics of Government* have been changed by the decades-long effects of devolution and its trend of governing responsibility moving to local government, and this was on display in Ferndale. State and Federal aid dollars had been dropping for many years and will continue to drop, and this helped, among other factors, put Ferndale in a financial bind. Supporters of the millage used this to explain the financial situation of the city and deflect, intentionally or unintentionally, criticism away from City management and place it on the global forces like devolution and a depressed economy. Additionally, the new attributes of public leadership, in the era of devolution, were on display in Ferndale. Cole, Hissong and Arvidson (1999) and Eisinger (1998) argued that devolution placed a premium on public management, with sound financial skills trumping previous qualities such as building a racial agenda. This dynamic was universally present throughout my informants; for those against the millage, their central disagreement with City leadership was that they were not fiscally responsible and were more concerned with things like pursuing a “liberal” agenda of environmentally-friendly City

buildings. Even in defending their actions, City leadership was quick to claim fiscal responsibility as a source of legitimacy and down played notions of having a broader “social” agenda.

The *Identity of Ferndale* was certainly changed by the layoffs of police and fire officials and further threatened with the prospect of more. From the research of Carr and LeRoux (2005) citizens were the least supportive of merging of public safety services. While my research did not directly ask about support for merging of public safety, there was a general apathy or, at least, a lack of concentrated outrage about layoffs of police and fire officials. While part of the impetus for the millage was to prevent further layoffs, many residents, officials and even police officials were not concerned about the previous layoffs. Perhaps enough time had passed, more than a year, since the layoffs that people just did not care anymore and had come to accept it as status quo. Additionally, the fact that services were minimally affected by layoffs probably contributed to this apathy, because how are residents to really know or care about layoffs if service delivery hasn't been significantly impacted?

Study Limitations

In terms of limitations, this study was hampered by its small-scale and personal relationships I had with many of my informants. First, while many may judge my work here as not replicable, I disagree. What happened in Ferndale is happening in cities large and small, not only in Michigan, but also in the United States and the World. Americans, and others in advanced societies, are grappling with the reality of dwindling resources and growing demand from other nations. In most every municipality one studies the same players will be found—

from those who wrap themselves in the rhetoric and aesthetics of civic pride and argue for higher taxes for maintaining services to those who believe that government is an ever-growing beast consuming and wasting their hard-earned tax dollars. That dichotomy presents itself in any debate about taxation, community identity, and policy priorities.

Next, the small-scale nature of my research allowed me to develop personal relationships with my informants—to really understand their hopes, fears and dreams. Survey data is important, but gaining insight into the human condition in the way that ethnographic research does, adds a distinct support to my work. With that in mind, I ran the risk of over-identifying with my subjects, and while I don't believe that happened, you can't ignore the raw emotion of a mother confessing her worst anxieties about how she's going to pay for her cancer treatment drugs, or her kid's college or her mortgage, and how that all colors her opinions on taxation policy. I do believe I was fair to all who participated in this project and outsiders may say that I could have gotten too close to my subjects, but that was merely strength of my research.

Additionally, my survey was based on an extremely small sample size. One so small that only descriptive statistics could be reported. Some may find fault with such a small size, but there are only 35 sworn officers in the department, so I ended up surveying about 20% of the department. The results of survey were confirmed with all the police sources I talked with, not just the one who did a recorded interview with me.

Areas for Future Research

Though the American public has grown accustomed to austerity and reduced government services, this phenomenon is still relatively new in academia and is understudied. As time passes and the face of austerity becomes the public face of government—for I do not seriously believe that, when the American and World economies recover, government will revert to pre-recession policies—we will be better equipped to judge its impact on American life and the redefined social contract between citizen and government. American municipalities, for the most part, have accepted reduced revenue—not only from high levels of government, but from their own residents—as the order of the day, and current research among civic leaders will clearly display that.

What will change, I suspect, is the psychological perceptions citizens and public employees have towards government. For one, many citizens enjoy the services government provides but are obstinate about paying for them. Rallying against reduced police, fire and school services makes for a great political campaign stump, but our leaders are still selling us, and we are still buying, the illusion of full employment and excellent government services, when, in reality, the proverbial “pie” of World-wide resources is ever-shrinking. This is where future research for political, social, cultural and community psychology lies. How well people accept (or reject) this new economic reality that most economists predict to be the future? How will this redefine our communities? How community resources are delegated or not and who will or will not have access to them?

In the same vein, these questions must be asked of our public employees. Like the citizens they serve, many have not fully accepted this new public-order. Many have held out for

public rage to overturn budget cuts, but that has yet to materialize in any meaningful way—especially given that Republican Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin survived a union-funded recall election after slashing public spending and eliminating collective bargaining rights for many public employees. Additionally, as my police informant stated, he and many other police officers became cops because it was a stable job that paid well. Will that paradigm continue to be true in this new order? And will this discourage future potential public servants? Future researchers would do well to look into this social, cultural and psychological fallout.

Conclusions

The forces that created the massive budgetary pressures on municipal governments like Ferndale are many and are far-reaching. From Ronald Reagan's devolution, to a global market place, to a bubble-era economy that burst, all American cities, their citizens and their public servants are living in an radically new world where dwindling resources can no longer match historically-high expectations. No longer can civic leaders expect that revenue will come from the Federal government or state government. No longer can public employees like police officers think they are immune to salary cuts and layoffs. No longer can citizens expect that they will not have to pay more for the services that they cherish.

All these are blunt conclusions that few will admit and fewer will accept. Behind much of the denial and shock is a confluence of psychological forces—fear, envy, distrust, anxiety—that inform and explain my themes of trust, hopelessness, community identity and realities of recession-era governance. All these global-level phenomenon are explained by individual-level psychological factors that, in turn, help explain and predict individual behaviors. For example,

for many of my anti-millage informants, their opposition was rooted in more than just dollars and cents—it was, in Kathy Berryman’s case, rooted in anxiety and fear about losing her job and paying all the bills after her husband had lost his. For the Gagne’s it was rooted in the frustration of not being heard by their elected leaders. For pro-millage supporters it was a gnawing fear that their beloved community and its services would be decimated by an intransigence of some to contribute more or petty “axes to grind” among others.

For the public employees like cops, an already psychologically-stressing and physically dangerous job was further complicated by low-morale, bitterness, and uncertainty of a once-stable career now in jeopardy. While these feelings did not outwardly change how most officers did their jobs, there was a noticeable shift in attitudes towards their jobs and bitterness that their jobs were no longer sacred and safe. Rather, in this new age of fiscal uncertainty for local governments, everything was fair game for cuts. Reluctance to raise taxes coupled with declining revenues have put many local communities in a lose-lose situation where “luxury” services like a fully-staffed City Hall or grass cutting are cut to prevent even more cuts to public safety. Public employees are the collateral damage of this new era. Perhaps this decimation could be “creative” and help streamline municipal operations in many cities. More likely, though, I suspect that there will be a lingering cynicism among public employees who had one foot in the “good-ole days” and another in the present. Many will not be able to square their expectations with the new fiscal order and their bitterness could adversely affect the public service they provide. For new public servants, their jobs may not carry the same prestige and purpose as it once did for previous generations. The “specialness” of a government job—a defined pension, excellent healthcare, a living wage—that compensated for the unique hardships of public service—has been radically

redefined, and is, in many localities, history. This will, no doubt, deter many qualified workers, because public service may lose its nobility as a “calling.”

For municipal leaders, the ever-dwindling resources to do their job has reinforced the tenants of fiscal-prudence and cost-effective service delivery. Running a city is no longer about promoting some utopian vision like racial harmony or social justice, but about providing basic services cheaply and effectively. The dollar is the true force behind government now and every penny spent could be scrutinized by a populace that is increasingly frustrated about their own economic circumstances—the product of a boom-bust World economy. Many of these residents are quick to direct their frustration onto to their local government and blame leaders for their own economic failings for reasons that are spurious at best.

The rise of the Tea Party—and the raw anger, and, in some instances, violence, directed towards government, it has created—is a troubling example of this phenomenon. While it is true that our government has a debt crisis that must be addressed, the Tea Party has changed the conversation for municipal leaders. Residents are charging that “waste, fraud and abuse”—Tea Party rhetoric—are what is holding back economic, social and political growth in their town. While those claims are usually unfounded—because there is waste, fraud and abuse in any organization—both public and private—rarely is there enough to noticeably balance a budget. In Ferndale, for example, some anti-millage residents claimed they city was wasting money by running sprinklers during rainy days (Parris 2011)—wasteful to be sure, but not the kind of whose elimination prevents the layoffs of cops and firefighters.

Regardless of the accuracy of such claims of fraud and abuse, municipal leaders must handle an angry populace. While most of them understand, or at least acknowledge, the struggles of their residents, they are still consumed with balancing budgets with fewer and fewer dollars in an arcane budget processes that very few citizens understand. The challenge for them is to encourage more citizen participation in the budgeting process—so that they understand the complexities of municipal management—but to also accept the increased scrutiny that comes with the public light.

For residents, citizens and voters—which encompasses all of us—there must be some thought put into what we want from our leaders and public servants and what we are willing to contribute for it. While it is true that individual behavior is motivated by many psychological processes—many of which have been detailed in this study—citizens must look beyond their own wallet, household and politics. What is happening now is probably the most historic realignment of the social contract since the New Deal. It is abundantly clear that our country lacks the resources it had in the post-World War II economy. With this in mind, we must decide to either pay less and have less, or pay more and maintain or expand current service—a hard pill to swallow, to be sure, but true nonetheless.

In the end, this research, this story, is a tale of self-interest and the anxiety, bitterness, hope and joy when that self-interest is promoted or threatened—the underlying processes of the emotional and pragmatic components of civic life. The challenge going forward is how we align that self-interest for the greater good—if we choose that. Just because one doesn't use a service doesn't mean others don't, and the opposite is true. We cannot have it both ways—pay for only

the services and goods we want and none that we do not. Communities must decide whether to turn back the clock to the days where “essential” services like health, safety and education were commodities to be bought and sold like any other good, or decide that such “public goods” should be treated differently and that all will contribute and benefit from them. This is only the beginning of a new chapter in how we define ourselves in the context of the communities we inhabit and we are writing that history now with what we choose to do and not do

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Appendix A: Michigan Property Taxes

In Michigan—as in most states—property taxes pay for the bulk of city services—from police and fire to assessing and code enforcement. In Michigan, property taxes are determined by State Equalized Value, or SEV. SEV is half the value that the city determines the property to be worth. For example, if a house is valued—by the city assessor (not the actual amount the house could sell for)—at \$100,000, the SEV would be \$50,000, or half the value (Ravary). From there, taxes are determined by mills. One mil is equal to one dollar in taxes per \$1000 in SEV. So, using the above house as an example, one mil would generate \$50.00 in taxes. Total mills is a combination of many services, such as the city operating millage—to pay for city operations like police and fire; a school millage to pay for the local schools; a refuse millage to pay for garbage collection.

In Ferndale, residents pay a total millage rate of 48.0584 mills. What follows is a breakdown of the total millage rate and what a resident with an SEV of \$50,000 would pay for each component of the total millage rate: 14.5448 is the city operating millage (\$727.24); 2.1815 for garbage collection (\$109.08); 6.000 for city debt (\$300.00); 0.0825 for a publicity tax (\$4.13); 1.9601 for the library (\$98.01); 16.369 for the local school and intermediate districts (\$818.45); 1.5844 for Oakland Community College (\$79.22); 0.5900 is for the S.M.A.R.T bus system; 4.7461 for combined (\$237.31) ("City of ferndale," 2011).

Appendix B: Michigan State Shared Revenue (SSR)

SSR is a redistribution of the state tax revenue from the State Government to local governments to augment local property taxes and it is broken down into two parts in Michigan. The first is called Constitutionally-mandated SSR. This component is a constitutionally-set amount of money that the State of Michigan must give back to municipalities—it is a minimum, legally-binding amount. Currently, the constitutionally mandated amount is 15% of the gross sales tax revenues. The second part is called Statutory SSR. This amount is set by the Michigan State Legislature each year and can be raised or lowered. Currently 21% of the gross sales tax is devoted to this part of SSR ("Michigan state revenue,"). State SSR is distributed to local governments based on a formula that takes into account such factors as millage burden, home values and population of a given community.

But like all levels of government during the 2008 Great Recession, the State of Michigan began cutting back on Statutory SSR with the Legislature voting to decrease payments to local government. In Ferndale, the drop went from a high of \$4.5 million in 2001 to a projected low of \$1.5 million in 2013 ("City of ferndale," 2011). Increasingly, the message from Lansing to local governments was to do more with less and do not expect a hand from the State. Additionally, 2010 saw the election of Rick Snyder, a Republican, as Governor of Michigan. Snyder, who campaigned as "One Tough Nerd," vowed to get the State's finances in line—which meant, among other changes, cutting money to local communities. The Statutory SSR formula was changed so that communities could only get two-thirds the amount of money that they had previously gotten—a significant drop of much-needed revenue (Wollwenweber, 2011). Taken

together, the drop in revenue from property taxes and from State Shared Revenue sent Ferndale and many other cities into a fiscal crisis. Confronted with dropping revenues and increasing costs, the Ferndale City Council had to take action.

Appendix C

The contrast between the old and new style of municipal leadership can be seen by two recent Mayors of Detroit whose terms ran next to each other. Coleman Young (Mayor from 1973-1993) was the first Black mayor of Detroit and was seen as a “Champion of the Race.” Young made it his mission to put “Black faces in high places” and he actively recruited minorities and women into municipal employment through the use of affirmative-action programs. Young also managed to alienate the business community and white voters with his infamously racially-polarizing and inflammatory rhetoric. But Young was caught in the middle of devolution's reduction in federal dollars and his message of black empowerment was drowned out by the post-industrial nightmare of rising crime, white and capital flight and the Crack Epidemic—all massive social disasters that quickly overwhelmed the capabilities of Detroit to manage.

Dennis Archer succeeded Coleman Young and sensed the tectonic shifts in local governance and Washington's new spending priorities. Archer eliminated the racial rhetoric of his predecessor and focused on building bridges with the white suburbs and the business community that had been seriously damaged under the Young administration. As evidence of the new paradigm that local leaders' success was a function “of performance, not ideology,” Archer landed new economic development with three Casinos and two new sport stadiums in downtown Detroit. Additionally, when a massive snow storm overwhelmed the ability of Detroit to plow its streets, neighboring communities pitched-in to help.

Appendix D: Anonymous Survey

Below we ask you 16 questions about your feelings and attitudes after two important events: The June 2010 layoffs and the Passage of the May Millage. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree) please answer these questions

A. After the June 2010 lay offs, I felt ...

1... the residents of Ferndale trusted their police department

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

2... confident about my job security

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

3. ... morale was low in the department

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

4. ... City Administration supported the department

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

5. ... police officers did not have a voice in the layoff debate

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

6. ... less safe on patrol because of reduced manpower

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

7. ... my willingness to be productive (e.g. writing tickets) has decreased

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

8. ... it has been harder to get time off or vacation time because of decreased staffing

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

B. After the May 2011 Millage passed, I felt ...**9. ... the residents trusted their police department**

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

10. ... confident about my job security

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

11. ... morale is low in the department

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

12. ... City Administration supports the department

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

13. ... less safe on patrol because of reduced manpower

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

14. ... my willingness to be productive (e.g. writing tickets) has decreased

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

15. ... it is harder to get time off or vacation time because of decreased staffing

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

16. ... the extra money residents will pay in taxes is worth the return they get with no

more

police lay offs

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

C. What are your current feelings and attitudes. These questions are about your current, post-layoff and post-millage thoughts/feelings. How much do you agree with the following:

17. The layoffs and the millage were a wake up call for me to pay more attention to city politics and finances than I previously did.

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

18. There was no more money in the city's budget, police officers had to be laid-off

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

19. Cities like Ferndale are being forced into financial crisis by State and Federal governments

20. Even though times are tough, most residents could afford to pay more for police services

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

21. It is important that the police are involved in community politics:

A. ...so that we can explain the importance of our jobs to residents

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

B. ...so that residents and elected officials understand the dangers to public safety of police cuts

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

C. ...so that we can support elected officials who will support and protect our interests

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. no opinion 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

D.so that residents know we weren't the cause of the city financial crisis

Finally, we'd like to ask your opinion on these issues. Feel free to write your responses below:

22. Some people who opposed the millage claimed that the city had a history of wasting tax- payers money and that the millage would be another such waste. What do you think about this?

23. To what extent was the city's financial crisis foreseeable and preventable?

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