Why Don’t We Plan for Climate Change? Reaffirming Planners’ Roles and Ethical Responsibilities in the Climate Crisis

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Abstract

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This thesis answers the question, how are individual planners’ values and ethics reflected in their decisions about planning priorities in communities with severe climate risks? I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with local planners in Western Washington State after severe regional floods in 2021. Many interviewees’ responses suggested an internal contradiction between strong personal beliefs about the importance of climate action versus a reluctance or outright opposition to channeling such beliefs professionally. I urge planners to carefully consider what values and ethics underpin their definitions of the public interest, and how those concepts translate to their roles and responsibilities as professionals in context of climate change. These reflections are important because ultimately, what decisions planners make and how they are made will determine whether communities will survive an increasingly disruptive climate crisis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank family, friends, and mentors for the privileges and opportunities that led me to finding a passion for the possibilities in planning.

Many thanks to Jan and Bob for reading all of the hundred-some pages.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Bob,
who despite it all, believed in
compassion, kindness, and our planetary interdependence.

We form an initial impression of compassion, and an impulse to action following from that compassion, by confronting our own mortality. When we vividly realize that we are mortal, we come to the basic insight that we are not self-sufficient. … In fact, our independence is incredibly fragile. We depend upon the kindness and support of others. We depend on the complex integrations of our social constructions with sets of natural systems and phenomena which constitute our viable life-worlds. … If we can recognize our common finitude and common dependence, we can come to realize how fragile these ecosystems or mixed communities are and become able to maintain, nurture, and keep these delicate mixed communities in balance.

(Mugerauer 1996, in Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 364-5)

Chapter 1. Introduction

"First they baked, then they burned, and now they're inundated." *The Washington Post* thus reported on the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, describing the heat waves, wildfires, floods, and landslides that all occurred within the latter half of 2021. In Western Washington, the floods that began in November and returned in smaller waves stayed in the headlines for months, before eventually dropping out of the news cycle. The floods were triggered by a passing atmospheric river, dropping an impressive amount of rain and resulting in substantial floods, landslides, and associated damage in the area. In just two days from the 14th to the 15th of November, Bellingham was doused with about five inches of rain, more than the usual average rainfall for the entire *month* (*KING 5*, November 19, 2021; *Weather & Climate*, n.d.). In Sumas, 75% of properties suffered flood damage (Miller, November 18, 2021 in *KING 5*), and more than 158,000 customers in the region lost power on the 15th (Zhou, November 16, 2021 in *The Seattle Times*). On the same day, Governor Inslee issued an emergency proclamation for 14 counties. The immediate loss of life and property was clear, but it would pale in comparison to consequences from the aftermath and its long-term disruptions to agriculture and finances at multiple scales.

1.1 Purpose

Although November's floods were dramatic and record-breaking in certain areas, Western Washington is no stranger to winter storms and overflowing rivers. According to the Washington Department of Ecology, flooding tops the list of the most expensive natural disasters in the state, and its frequency and severity are expected to increase with climate change due to more rain, sea level rise, and secondary effects of wildfires (Department of Ecology, n.d.). Yet, floods are just

one type of climatic and geological events that pose worsening risks with climate change, which also interact to produce compounded impacts on the state's ecosystems, including human habitats.

If communities in Western Washington take the existing and worsening impacts of climate change seriously, including property damage, death of and injury to humans and livestock, and ecological degradation, they should be highly motivated to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Governments, in particular, have a responsibility to make physical, financial, and social investments to prepare communities for inevitable, hazardous events. Urban and regional planners, as part of governing institutions, play an important role in developing community visions, plans, and codes that guide such needed investments. Yet, even though climate change may be one of the most impactful factors in the public's well-being, it is often not the top priority because of its prolonged time scale, economic or political forces actively preventing effective action, and conflicting ideas about what actions should be taken, among other reasons (e.g., Adger et al. 2009; Hamin, Gurran, and Emlinger 2014; Salon, Murphy, and Sciara 2014). Thus, planners must make difficult decisions in balancing the needs of planning for climate change with other planning objectives, as well as in managing the influences of incongruous private and political interests—these decisions and how they are made were the focus of my research.

1.2 Goal

Through this thesis, I aimed to understand how city and county planners' stated and implied values and ethics drive their decisions in the context of climate change, which contribute to decisions made by the local government and thus influence both adaptation to climate change impacts at the local level and mitigation of climate change at the global level. Planners are, by definition, future-oriented actors who look further and broader than their collaborators within and beyond local government, including elected officials, engineers, and the broader public. In the

context of the climate crisis, planners must contend with the dilemma that even though climate change poses an existential threat to humanity and thus should be met with a correspondingly high level of urgent and collaborative action, the myriad stakeholders involved (even just at a local level) often have seemingly conflicting interests and objectives, some of which contribute to climate action and many of which do not. As mediators and facilitators in reconciling these interests or at least tempering unproductive conflicts, planners' own perceptions of climate change, their definitions of their professional roles and responsibilities to the public, their decision-making motivations, and the values, morals, and ethics that underlie all of those factors must be made explicit if we want to understand how decisions are eventually made by the community as a whole. This understanding is important because ultimately, what decisions are made and how they are made will determine whether communities will survive an increasingly intense and costly climate crisis.

My goal for this thesis is to demonstrate that planners have an ethical responsibility to advance climate change, which comprises different dimensions of ethics, including personal ethics and professional ethics. I do try to point out points of intervention and a general approach to influencing different kinds of actors such as elected officials and members of the public, but this is not a toolkit for implementation. Rather, it is a call for reflecting on the roles and responsibilities that planners have in the global climate crisis. I urge planners to seriously reengage with the phrase "think global, act local," albeit canned. It is not my goal to impose a specific set of ethical (what is right) or moral (what is good) beliefs. Rather, I challenge planners to determine for themselves what "right" and "good" means for them in context of their profession and the climate crisis, noting both their instinctive reactions to those ideas and the thoughts that develop through both self-reflection and conversations with others. Perhaps it is true that in a pluralist and post-structuralist—

even post-truth—world, we do not share a common Truth or a common destination (Mugerauer 1996, in Mugerauer and Manzo 2008). Still, as embodied beings, for a limited time, we cross paths as we wander to our own destinations. We do so in the same sliver of space between the earth of our Earth and the infinity of the universe. Ultimately, our planet and the universe will go on without us; the crisis we face is about saving ourselves and the myriad multi-species communities that both support and depend on us. To save ourselves from the climate crisis is not only about individual survival; it is about how we treat one another as equally worthy beings of life, of health, of well-being. It is about respecting one another's autonomy yet recognizing our interdependence. Planners, as the self-proclaimed big-picture thinkers and common-ground seekers, should be familiar with this worldview, and we should embrace the powerful value-based thinking reflected in this belief about our interdependence instead of pursuing a non-existent value-neutrality (Vigar 2012). Having values does not prohibit us from being objective or substantiable, as some may fear. Rather, our values ground us in our ethical duties as servants of the public interest and protects us from a risky relativism that interacts with capitalist and authoritarian forces to produce landscapes of exploitation and destruction (Mugerauer 1996, in Mugerauer and Manzo 2008).

1.3 Question

In the following pages, I attempt to ground these lofty assertions in an exploration of how planners in local governments draw explicit or implicit connections between their personal values and ethics, their perceptions of their professional responsibilities as planners serving the public interest, and their roles in climate change and in shaping the futures of their communities more generally. As such, my central research question is, how are individual planners' values and ethics reflected in their decisions about planning priorities in communities with severe climate risks?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this literature review, I explore three threads of work in preparation to answer the central research question. First, I review literature on planner's roles and ethics to establish the significance of planners and the fundamental factors that drive their work, such as their interpretation of the public interest. Next, I discuss how competing demands and interests lead planners to find compromises between them, which can have both positive and negative consequences for planning ethics. Lastly, I examine drivers and barriers in planning for climate change, and how planners have tried to overcome the barriers. It should be acknowledged that while I center my overall argument about planners' ethical responsibility to address climate change on a small selection of works, there is a substantial amount of research and scholarship on relevant topics not referenced here.

2.1 Planners' Roles and Ethics

According to the American Institute of Certified Planners' Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (AICP Code), planners have a "special responsibility … to serve the public interest with compassion for the welfare of all people" (AICP 2021, 1). Yet, to do so is not a unique function of planners. Many others, including elected officials and civil engineers, also serve the public interest. Planners' role in serving the public interest is more specific; they do so considering the future, by setting up the steps required to get to a future state that aligns with the public interest. The AICP Code characterizes planners' contributions as their attention to "long-range consequences" and "interrelatedness of decisions" (AICP 2021, 2). Thus, ideally, planners should formulate coherent, comprehensive, and long-term visions for human habitats by looking far and wide when making decisions—wider than a bridge engineer and further than an elected official.

2.1.1 *Planners Have Limited but Real Influence*

Before we go further, I acknowledge that planners are not all-powerful. On one hand, planners matter because planners make decisions that directly shape human habitats and welfare (Pineda Pinto 2020). On the other, planners are but one group of actors who influence decisions made, and their influence is constrained by the institutional, social, political, cultural, and economic systems in which they work. For example, in the United States, governmental institutions are generally well established with elaborate procedures that are resistant to change because of both inertia and ties between politics and profit interests (Pineda Pinto 2020). Combining these two views leads us to the unsurprising conclusion that planners have limited direct influence over the final decisions (compared to a mayor or city council, for example), but they do have some power in shaping what more powerful actors see and think in certain decision-making settings. Planners also exercise discretion on the ground when implementing higher-level policies, so they *can* help advance systematic and institutional changes necessary for climate action.

2.1.2 *Legitimacy of the Planning Profession*

Since the professionalization of planning in the 1900s and up to the 1950s, planning represented a rational and technical practice whose products' effectiveness could be objectively evaluated via a set of normative criteria (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021). The prevailing purpose of planning then was a systematic, organized approach to manage overpopulation and the human health and resource management challenges that resulted from it (Taylor 2009). However, this perception changed in the following decades, driven by socio-political shifts and questions about what and whose interests planning really serves. In the 1960s and 1970s, a pluralist view of society came to the forefront, critiquing the claim that there is one right answer to achieving the public

interest, or that there even is a singular public (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021). If there is no monolithic or singular public, then there is no monolithic or singular public interest, thus challenging the normative and top-down approach to traditional conceptions of planning.

Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, Jürgen Habermas' concept of moral discourse sparked the "communicative turn" in planning theory, shifting the purpose of planning from technical analysis to mediation between different interests (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021). Instead of planners determining a set of criteria to rationally produce and evaluate plans and programs, the public interest was to be decided by members of the public in an open, participatory process. Lastly, in the 1980s, neoliberalism further challenged the legitimacy of planning and government functions more broadly, shifting the planner's role "from the public regulator to the entrepreneur and policy broker" (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 549). Not only did planners have to implement governmental policy, they also had to "attract private-sector investment" as funding from higher levels of government shrank (Fainstein and Lubinsky 2020, 133). Thus, instead of the earlier archetype of a visionary planner, the profession became perceived by the public as a conduit for private developers to promote economic growth (Fainstein and Lubinsky 2020).

In effect, these shifts in socio-political history have cast doubt on the legitimacy of the planning profession (Vigar 2012). Against this backdrop, I highlight two tensions that challenge the role of the planner. First, is there a singular public interest, and can it be known? If there isn't one, or if it isn't knowable, then how can planners possibly serve it? Second, who should decide what is good for the public? Why should planners get a say in determining the future of communities when they are not elected by the people they claim to serve?

2.1.3 *Confronting Ethics and Defining the Public Interest*

Parallel to this shifting view of planning was a change in planners' own perceptions about their profession. In Heather Campbell's 2012 essay, she describes a shift in consciousness among planners about the nature of planning following Peter Marcuse's 1976 article, "Professional Ethics and Beyond: Values in Planning." Before the article was published, the conventional understanding of planning was a technical act, situated in the context of the field's professionalization and its engagement with the environmental movement. In the following decades, however, that understanding diversified to include a political role in addition to a technical one. In the new, politicalized (and sometimes politicized) understanding of planning, more planners now recognize the influence of values and ethics in the profession, even when those influences are not explicitly stated or when some planners try to claim value-neutral objectivity. In her essay, Campbell (2012) frames planning as an act to shape a better future, and fundamentally, "better" implies a normative belief about what is good or bad. There can be no improvement if we do not decide what is good or bad about the current situation. Hence, if we accept Cambell's framing, then planning implies taking an ethical stance on what should and shouldn't be done, which is an inherently subjective and value-based opinion. Here, I understand ethics as what is right or wrong, values as what is important or not, and morals as what is good or bad. These beliefs, while subjective, do tend to converge for human beings in general (Mugerauer 1996 in Mugerauer and Manzo 2008), especially if those humans share a socio-politico-cultural context. That said, as Dadashpoor and Sheydayi (2021) and Campbell (2012) describe, broader changes in the previous decades have diversified understandings of rationality and knowledge, thus complicating planners' ability to assert their professional opinions about right and wrong.

Given this difficulty to define what is right or not in terms of planning, Campbell (2012) observes, the planning field simply avoided the question. As an example, Campbell quotes Howe and Kaufman's 1979 study of "how contemporary planners view ethics," the intention of which was to "*describe* what planners think is ethical, *not to judge* whether or not planners are ethical by some predetermined standard" (Howe and Kaufman 1979, 244, emphasis added). Campbell critiques that such a stance reflects planning scholars' eagerness to maintain a "non-judgmental distance," even as "ethical concerns were increasingly regarded as highly significant" in planning (2012, 386). However, Campbell continues to point out that even though scholars and practitioners alike avoided "being seen to adopt (or impose) a particular substantive ethical stance," they in fact did express "exactly such value-based motivations" in less conspicuous ways (2012, 386). Thus, she characterizes one challenge for planning theory and practice as "**how to articulate substantive ethical values, given the political nature of planning, without appearing insensitive, at best, or imposing and dogmatic, at worse**" (Campbell 2012, 386). This is a major theme that will resurface in the Findings and Discussion chapters later.

At first glance, avoiding an explicit endorsement of certain ethical values may seem like a prudent position, given that there is no absolute good or bad in planning (or anywhere), and that planners serve an increasingly diverse public. However, Campbell (2012) argues, the consequence of not making ethics explicit is that problematic or outdated ethics go unquestioned, and thus the status quo prevails. The climate crisis is a clear example of the possibly disastrous outcomes of allowing current beneficiaries of the crisis to continue shaping our collective futures instead of establishing clear values and objectives that would guide growth and change in the public interest in the longer term.

As early as the 1990s, Canadian scholar Sue Hendler attempted to reestablish planning's legitimacy as a profession, when she argued that "planning as a profession has validity, but only when one recognises the **falsity of techno-rational neutrality**, and begins to open up the terrain of **planning's underlying moral mandate**" (Vigar 2012, 362). Campbell's essay is precisely a response and a call to action founded on Hendler's works. As Campbell (2012) conceptualizes, planning exists in a tension between the pessimism of critical analysis and the optimism of positive change, both of which rest on beliefs about relative good and bad, and relative right and wrong. If planning is to remain relevant, planners must embrace it as a value-driven practice and not be afraid of the admittedly difficult process of determining what is good and right for their particular context (Campbell 2012).

Yet, **what does serving the public interest actually mean in practice?** Over time, the interpretation of the public interest has undergone such change and diversification that the concept no longer offers practical guidance, becoming more of an abstract concept. Perhaps it is because of this lack of agreement on a definition that many parties claiming to serve the public interest have such different approaches to achieving it. In response to this predicament, Dadashpoor and Sheydayi created a framework to evaluate definitions of the "public interest" by answering four key questions (2021, 555):

1. What is the nature of the public interest?
2. Who defines the public interest?
3. By what process is the public interest defined?
4. What is the use of public interest?

Based on how definitions of the public interest answered these four questions, Dadashpoor and Sheydayi grouped ten definitions into four categories. The first of these categories drew from

philosophical discourse on ethics, which often begins from the distinction between deontological ethics and teleological ethics. In the planning context, the *deontological* definition of the public interest suggests that planners have a "moral obligation" to determine what is good for society by conforming to "duty and moral law," whereby "any plan and program should benefit all citizens" (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 547-8). One critique of this definition is that a fair process could produce unfair outcomes, and deontological ethics do not address the quality of the consequences. The *teleological* definition of the public interest addresses this shortcoming and is based on maximizing happiness for the greatest number of people, no matter the means and motivations involved in achieving that outcome. This definition is also criticized, however, because it does not consider the interests of the minority. Also, since both deontological and teleological definitions are based on ethical principles, they do not offer much guidance for application. For example, neither definition tells planners *what* would "benefit all citizens" or "maximize happiness" for the most people.

As suggested earlier, perhaps it is because of this lack of guidance from either planning theory or practitioners that planners disagree on what is ethical or not in practice. In the study by Howe and Kaufman (1979) that Campbell (2012) critiqued, the authors found that their 616 survey respondents had a wide range of opinions about whether an action was ethical in each of 15 planning-related scenarios. For instance, at the time of writing, the AICP code read, "Except with the consent of the client or employer … a planner shall not reveal … information gained in the professional relationship, … the disclosure of which would likely be detrimental to the client or employer" (Howe and Kaufman 1979, 246). Yet, 31% of respondents answered that it was ethical for a planner to give information to an environmental group without authorization, even though it

was implied that the leak could potentially jeopardize the agency's legitimacy.[1] Although the 31% was a minority compared to the 59% of respondents who said the action was unethical (10% said unsure), a third is certainly not a negligible proportion. This then begs the question, what is the purpose of having a code of ethics? Is it to strictly regulate behavior or to roughly define the confines of what is ethical or not? If planners must act in the public's interest (the AICP Code says "A planner serves the public interest primarily"), and a planner does not think a policy is serving the public interest, are they justified to sabotage that policy, using whatever tactic it takes? In other words, does the end justify the means? And who should have the final say on which position best serves the public interest? For example, what if in that scenario, the agency director found out about the information leak and decided to fire the planner who leaked it? Would that be ethical?

Several decades later, Lauria and Long (2019) followed up on the planning ethics discourse and characterized three sources of ethical beliefs: private ethics, workplace norms, and professional ethics (personally constructed or based on professional codes). The authors found that slightly more than half (56%) of their 61 planner interviewees said they used different ethical principles in their private lives versus their professional lives. Does that mean that professional codes and workplace norms do not match what planners themselves think are right to do? If so, that raises a significant red flag in how ethical codes and norms in planning are stipulated, and whether they truly align with serving the public interest. Alternatively, professional codes of ethics and workplace norms could be "correcting" individual planners' private ethics. Thus, we might then question whose "bad" ethics are thankfully being corrected by "good" codes and norms, and which "good" planners are valiantly defying "bad" codes and norms. We have seen over time that

[1] The exact scenario was: "Regional planner who worked on a wetlands preservation study, without authorization, gives certain findings to an environmental group, because planner feels the agency's director purposely left out those findings, which were objectively documented, from the study draft because they do not support agency policy" (Howe and Kaufman 1979, 245).

what the profession thought were good ideas have sometimes resulted in unintended consequences, or that planners simply did not consider certain factors in their decisions that have since proven to be crucial to overall community wellbeing. There are also cases where a good idea is no longer appropriate with changes in society. For example, the separation of land uses, originally well-intentioned to protect most of the public from polluting uses like heavy industry, has become a driving force in increasing the need for transportation and its associated greenhouse gas emissions and environmental pollution. Furthermore, because such changes in understanding occur relatively slowly, industry best practices and agency norms can lag behind individuals' or knowledge communities' decisions about what is "good." Moreover, there is no guarantee that the most novel research or the most confident people are necessarily the most "correct."

In short, what is "good" depends both on the individual and their contemporary context. Given these disparate sources of ethical principles, who decides and how can one decide which source is "right"? Whose judgment truly aligns with the "public interest"? Obviously, this has important implications for planning practice. If we don't know what ethics planners are acting on, how would we know if they are making the right choices?

In part, it was exactly these unanswered questions that led Campbell to her 2012 piece. Because planners can no longer rely solely on normative and rational approaches to planning, planners are forced to justify how their decisions serve the public interest and to confront the myriad assumptions that underlie any choice. Hence, the question of ethics comes into play. As Campbell quotes from Martin Wachs, "as an intellectual and professional community, planners recognize that **every act of planning pursues certain human values** and that **planning is in many ways a series of statements about what we take to be right or wrong and what we take**

to represent priorities of the society in which the planning is undertaken" (Wachs 1995 in Campbell 2012, 380).

2.2 Compromises: Goals and Stakeholders

Given the multiple goals of planning, planners often need to decide what is most important in each situation. For example, in Washington state in the United States, the Growth Management Act establishes 14 goals that communities must meet through their comprehensive plans, including concentrated urban growth, affordable housing, economic development, environmental protection, and early and continuous public participation (Revised Code of Washington, Chapter 36.70A). The AICP Code also states that "An ethical judgment often requires a conscientious balancing" of the Code's aspirational principles, "based on the facts and context of a particular situation and on the precepts of the entire Code." Thus, the Code gives individual planners plenty of discretionary power to decide, based on contextual factors, what constitutes the best action according to "ethical judgment." Furthermore, the Code accepts that planners serve a "conscientiously attained concept of the public interest that is formulated through continuous and open debate," thus acknowledging that there is no single, stable definition of the "public interest." Together, the two statements essentially mean that there is no clear guidance for how to act when legitimate goals conflict, which is further complicated by the fact that what counts as "legitimate" goals also varies based on what is at stake in particular situations.

Planning practice is fraught with such conflicts. For example, should a coastal barrier be built to prevent disastrous flooding and stop coastal erosion, at the expense of fisherpeople and oyster production? Should a train line be built across a natural reserve, at the risk of bisecting an important forest habitat? Should a smaller upstream community be allowed to flood to protect a larger economic center downstream? These are three real examples that Chan and Protzen (2018)

used to illustrate the risks and opportunities of compromising. As the first two examples imply, protecting natural assets that mitigate climate hazards sometimes conflicts with other goals, such as maintaining economic viability and providing public transit for the city, which are arguably equally important to protect the "public interest," depending on context and the decision makers' ethics and priorities. Meanwhile, the third example raises the thorny issue of pitting one community's climate resilience against another's. In sum, adapting to climate change clearly requires a difficult and sometimes impossible balancing of various legitimate goals and of benefits and harms.

In this balancing process, not only do planners have to consider options on paper in a relatively detached manner akin to a cost-benefit analysis, but they often also must interact directly with stakeholders, who may be understandably emotional as these planning decisions ultimately shape their lived reality. Thus, by one understanding of the public interest, it is these stakeholders who should dictate the public interest and not the bureaucrats for whom decisions do not have such visceral meaning. In Dadashpoor and Sheydayi's (2021) categorization, this kind of definition of the public interest is founded on the participatory element in the planning process. According to these definitions, "there is no essential and fundamental public interest," (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 551) at least in the rationally normative sense. Instead, the public interest is determined through "an open, communicative process" that assumes "freedom of access, equal rights to participate," trust in the process and other parties, and "the absence of coercion" (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 551). Clearly, these assumptions are impossible in reality, since empirical evidence demonstrates that not everyone is invited to the table or has the capacity to prepare for participation. Therefore, the process can be purposefully or accidentally exclusionary, thus producing a "public interest" that does not consider the whole public.

The *consensus-based approach* to defining the public interest addresses this shortcoming by adding a facilitator—performed by the planner—to the communicative process, who is in charge of helping stakeholders reach a consensus on the public interest through "a logical debate" (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 552). Following this approach, the process of collectively considering what is "good" is more important than ensuring that everyone can voice their own interests. However, this approach has limitations as well. The *conflict management-based approach* critiques that parties with different interests and conflicting values cannot possibly reach a consensus; the best they can do is to find compromises and to satisfy their needs to the extent that they do not infringe on others' ability to do the same (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021).

Thus, combining these two needs to balance goals (such as through a cost-benefit analysis) and to balance stakeholder interests (such as through a communicative process), planners' role as the big-picture thinker seems clear, if difficult. While planners need to pay attention to each of the goals and stakeholders involved, they cannot lose sight of the overarching purpose of planning (if we accept Campbell's call to embrace normative values in planning), which is to formulate comprehensive plans in serving an admittedly nebulously defined public interest. The challenging nature of this task is exemplified in the path towards climate action.

2.3 Drivers and Barriers in Climate Action

If we accept that climate change poses significant risks to the "public interest," then planners have at least a professional obligation to mitigate climate change and prepare for its impacts. Yet, despite its multi-faceted and compounding effects ravaging much of the country, some communities fall short in preventing or preparing for the next possible event.

In California, Salon, Murphy, and Sciara (2014) surveyed all city and county planning departments in the state and found that the most important stated reasons for why "local

governments engage in sustainable practices" were to save money (59% of respondents said "extremely important") and to preserve the environment (52%). In addition, making the community more attractive (49%) and helping the local economy (44%) were important co-benefits, while external motivation from state and federal requirements (45%) also played a role. See Table 2-1 for a summary of the study's survey results.

Table 4. Survey results: why do local governments engage in sustainable practices?

Stated reason for action	Not important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Extremely important (%)	Don't know (%)
Internally motivated: normative aims				
Save money	3	31	59	7
Right thing	6	50	39	5
Be a leader	29	36	28	7
Internally motivated: tangible co-benefits				
Help local economy	4	46	44	6
Preserve environment	2	43	52	3
Attractive community	5	39	49	7
Externally motivated				
It is required	7	42	45	6
Anticipate future requirements	15	44	35	6

Figure 2-1. Salon, Murphy, and Sciara's survey results for why Californian local governments engage in sustainable practices (2014, 74)

The survey also showed that mayors and planning staff were most likely to be "a leading champion" for sustainability action, while planning staff and elected officials were most likely to be "a supporting champion" (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara 2014, 76). These results suggest that other than pushing for climate action themselves, planners can also increase the likelihood of action by influencing their mayors and elected officials. See Figure 2-2 for more details.

Table 6. Survey results: key local actors motivating sustainability action.							
	Mayor (%)	Elected officials (%)	Planning commission (%)	Planning staff (%)	Public work staff (%)	Other city staff (%)	Community (%)
A leading champion	24	17	9	30	18	13	20
A supporting champion	45	55	53	61	53	51	45
Not visibly championing sustainability	31	28	38	9	28	36	36

Figure 2-2. Salon, Murphy, and Sciara's survey results for key local actors motivating sustainability action in California (2014, 76)

Lastly, in California, the key situational factors that were a "substantial obstacle" to local climate action were financial resource availability, conflict with other budget priorities, and staff time availability. Staff expertise and political will in decision-making were most commonly seen as a "minor obstacle," while state and federal policies and actions were most commonly seen as a "minor enabler." Interestingly, "information availability" and "qualified contractor availability" were not seen as a factor in sustainability action (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara 2014, 76). See Figure 2-3 for more details.

Table 7. Survey results: situational factors that hinder or facilitate local sustainability actions.						
Situational factor	Substantial obstacle (%)	Minor obstacle (%)	Not a factor (%)	Minor enabler (%)	Substantial enabler (%)	Don't know (%)
Financial resource availability	70	13	3	3	9	3
Conflict/convergence with other budget priorities	62	25	6	3	1	4
Staff expertise	14	40	23	15	7	2
Staff time availability	47	33	7	6	5	2
Information availability	5	29	37	15	8	5
Qualified contractor availability	4	22	50	9	5	10
Political will in decision-making	21	36	11	14	12	6
State policies and actions	16	13	11	29	24	8
Federal policies and actions	15	14	19	29	14	9

Figure 2-3 Salon, Murphy, and Sciara's survey results for situational factors that hinder or facilitate local sustainability actions in California (2014, 76)

Overall, Salon, Murphy, and Sciara's (2014) survey results seem to suggest that other than state and federal requirements, the most influential factors for sustainability action may be characterized as a prioritization issue and not a technical one. This is reflected in the importance of co-benefits like cost savings, the influence of conflict or convergence with other budget

priorities, and the relative unimportance of staff expertise and information availability. Although the survey was about sustainability in general and not about climate change specifically, the conclusions likely apply to climate action as well. Furthermore, other research concur that climate action is most likely when it aligns with other priorities (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara, 2014).

In the context of the previous discussions on values and ethics, we could surmise that fundamentally, climate action depends on how important we think it is, not on the technical feasibility of implementing certain solutions or a lack of information about how to do so. For many types of climate action, we already know well what needs to be done, and numerous toolkits and exemplars already exist. If, given all these ripe conditions for action, local governments still choose not to act, then it appears that **knowledge or expertise are not sufficient to generate action**. Instead, they must be tied to advancing goals that protect other values or serve other priorities simultaneously.

This conclusion is supported by Adger et al. (2009), who argued that **limits to climate change adaptation are not biological, economic, or technological—as traditionally contended—but social, cultural, and psychological.** In some parts of the country, the phrase "climate change" is still taboo. In these contexts, inaction persists not necessarily because people are unaware of the tangible consequences of climate change, or because there are no solutions, but because the social and political context forbids action, at least when it is tied to politicized terms. Pineda Pinto (2020) makes a similar observation, writing that the social and political context in certain communities immediately make direct messaging about environmental and climate issues fall on deaf ears. Thus, planners in such contexts must **find other ways to communicate** the consequences of such hazards, such as by tying the consequences to values, perceptions of risk,

and sociocultural norms that are aligned with preventing environmental degradation instead of those that run counter to it (Adger et al. 2009; Wolf, Allice, and Bell 2013).

According to Adger et al. (2009), climate action becomes stalled when 1) there are conflicting goals due to diverse values among major stakeholders (*ethics*); 2) there is contestation over whether the available climate science is accurate enough to act on (*knowledge*); 3) there is debate over whether climate change impacts would have real effects that constitute legitimate risks (*risk*); and 4) stakeholders disagree on what intangible and symbolic assets are important to protect and how they weigh against other assets (e.g., physical, economic, etc.) (*culture*). These factors are intimately tied, as Wolf, Allice, and Bell (2013) found through interviews with indigenous communities in subarctic Canada. In these conversations, participants demonstrated how their implied and stated values influence their perceptions of climate risks, and how those perceptions in turn affect what are regarded as appropriate adaptation measures in response to climate change. According to the researchers, "Distinct values, such as tradition, freedom, harmony, safety, and unity" sometimes conflicted and acted as barriers to adaptation (Wolf, Allice, and Bell 2013, 548).

For example, the value of tradition was expressed by many participants as "feeling a connection to the past while on the land … where their ancestors hunted and fished" (Wolf, Allice, and Bell 2013, 555). When an unusually mild winter disrupted the communities' access to that land, they associated the possibility of future unusual winters with a sense of loss, feeling that a part of their life will be taken away. Because of participants' deep ties to their ancestral land and the perception of loss associated with being away from that land, most of them implied to the researchers that they "would not leave even if climatic conditions changed significantly," suggesting that appropriate adaptation measures for these members may need to be founded on staying in place instead of relocation. Thus, the authors concluded that "**adaptation research and**

policy need to address values explicitly if efforts for planned adaptation are to be perceived as legitimate and effective by those affected by the changing climate" (Wolf, Allice, and Bell 2013, 548). Even though the context for their research was different, the main message applies, which is that to overcome opposition to climate action, planners must recognize and validate the fears and anger that opponents may have, even if they seem irrational or dismissible to planners. Part of this recognition must involve an honest conversation about what people believe to be right, true, and valuable.

One example of how this plays out similarly in a different community is with floodplain management in the United States, where some property owners in the floodplain are resistant to buyouts because of the values they attach to the riverfront or coastal landscape, which cause them to perceive the risk of losing that landscape as greater than that of protecting the property itself. Hence, floodplain buyouts, especially when suggested from the top down by the government, has the potential to incite indignation rather than be received as a viable adaptation measure, particularly when the compensation offered and the proposed uses of acquired land are incompatible with the property owners' own preferences (Cardwell 2021).

Lastly, Pineda Pinto (2020) observed that the environmental conservation plans and vision statements she analyzed were much more ambitious than the planners she interviewed. This reflects the unfortunate reality that plans and visions can be as idealistic as desired about environmental stewardship, but in practice, there are trade-offs to be made between environmental goals and other objectives, whether directly and physically—as in developing greenfields, for example—or indirectly and fiscally, through the allocation of funds to other projects or priorities that take attention and resources away from environmental goals.

It should be noted that the works cited in this section center on the drivers and barriers related to climate *adaptation* rather than to *mitigation*. Dolšak and Prakash (2018) suggest this is because reducing greenhouse gas emissions (i.e., mitigation) requires local action yet does not generate immediate, tangible benefits for the local community. Instead, its benefits accrue to the larger national and global goals of emissions reduction. In contrast, adaptation provides concrete evidence for why climate action matters at the local level. The tangibility of benefits is crucial for two reasons: first, so the public can see a clear relationship between action and benefit, and second, so elected officials can justify attention and spending on climate action by pointing to benefits for constituents. That said, Dolšak and Prakash (2018) also warned against the possibility that politicians favor conspicuous projects over less visible ones, which may be counterproductive in some cases for lowering emissions or adapting to climate impacts.

2.4 Next Steps

In this literature review, I have briefly covered planners' roles, ethical responsibilities, and potential in advancing climate action, how they theoretically balance goals and different interests, and some empirical studies that summarize drivers and barriers to climate action at the local level.

Communities are not monoliths, and myriad actors have myriad concerns, some altruistic and comprehensive but mostly selfish and narrowly focused. At this noisy table, planners are sometimes seen as "mediators" or "facilitators" who weigh different interests and try to guide stakeholders towards a path forward that at least a majority can agree on (Fox-Rogers and Murphy 2016). Whose values and ethics prevail is partly determined by the participatory process, and partly through the priorities and beliefs held by decision makers such as elected officials, whom planners must contractually serve as government employees. The fact that planners may be responsible for

deciding which voices get amplified means that planners' own beliefs, values, and motivations also come into play.

Drawing on the works above, I propose that **rather than information or knowledge, it is values and ethics that drive planning action and inaction at the local level**, including planning for climate change or the lack thereof (Hamin, Gurran, and Emlinger 2014).

In summary, planners contribute an important long-term and comprehensive perspective to the forces that shape growth and change in a community. With less than 30 years until the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's deadline of reaching global carbon neutrality by 2050 in order to avoid damaging the planet to unlivable conditions for humans, bold action to mitigate climate change and to adapt to its inevitable effects in the meantime is urgent and nonnegotiable. Planners, as future-oriented actors who have a say in how communities evolve, must play their part in climate action. Yet, planners must also contend with conflicting community objectives and stakeholders with varying degrees of power at the negotiating table. As mediators in these negotiations, planners' own perceptions of climate change, their framing of their roles and responsibilities in climate action, their decision-making motivations, and the values and ethics that underlie all of those factors must be made explicit if we want to understand how decisions are eventually made by the community as a whole.

Chapter 3. Methods

My research goal was to understand how planners' stated and implied values and ethics drive their understanding of climate change in context of their professional responsibilities, which has crucial implications for whether communities will be able to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Following this goal, the central research question of this study was: How are individual planners' values and ethics reflected in their decisions about planning priorities in communities with severe climate risks?

3.1 Approach

To answer the central research question, I chose to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with practicing planners. My intent was to ask interviewees to scrutinize their own decision-making motivations and processes through questions on three themes: the interviewees' perceptions of their responsibilities as planners; their understanding of climate change and how it compares to that of their colleagues and other local actors; and their perceptions of tradeoffs they must make involving climate action. With these questions, my hope was to encourage interviewees to reflect on how they interpret their professional duties as planners, and to make explicit the underlying values and ethical beliefs that determine how they think and act. An interview guide with initial prompts and follow-up questions is included as Appendix A. The interview guide was developed based on a literature review of research on planning ethics, environmental ethics and justice, planners' roles and legitimacy, definitions of the public interest, communicative theory, types of compromises, and drivers and barriers in climate action.

Most of the interviews occurred in January 2022, with a couple in December 2021. After the interviews, I sent out a follow-up survey in April 2022 with questions about interviewees' background. Survey questions are included as Appendix B.

3.2 Sample Selection

This study involved two stages of sampling. First, I used purposive sampling to identify counties in Washington State that recently experienced severe climate change-related events. Second, I used volunteer and snowball sampling to contact potential interviewees within each of the selected counties. Both sampling stages were non-probabilistic because I was more interested in the depth of responses rather than their generalizability.

The selection of counties was primarily based on the intersection of counties named in both the "Emergency Proclamation of WSDOT Heat Damage" on September 1, 2021, and the "Emergency Proclamation of Severe Weather Damage" on November 15, 2021, by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee. The rationale for this selection was to focus on areas that face multiple, ongoing climatic risks that are exacerbated by climate change. My assumption was that planners in such areas are more likely to be aware of climate risks and to face pressures to plan for climate change. This is important because my research question centers on the conflicts and prioritization that arise when the recognized need to plan for climate change is pitted against other planning objectives. This intersection yielded the counties of King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Whatcom. In addition, I also decided post-hoc to include Skagit County and Clallam County, which were included in the Emergency Proclamation of Severe Weather Damage but not in the Emergency Proclamation of WSDOT Heat Damage. I made this decision because their experiences of serious damage were spotlighted in the news during the November 2021 floods, and because I wanted to reach out to more planners in case of a low response rate.

For each of the six counties, I identified the biggest cities and/or the cities that appeared most frequently in the news around November and December 2021 for notable weather events. Then, I sent an initial contact email to one person or a couple of people in each county and city, and I asked if they would like to be interviewed themselves or if they could forward the request to others in their department or division. I decided to send the initial email to the most senior person in the planning department or division, usually the person titled Director or Manager, because I thought they would be most likely to know of appropriate referrals if they did not want to be interviewed themselves. I did not specify any demographic characteristics in selecting my sample, but the participants ended up leaning towards the older, more experienced, and more managerial (rather than technical) planners. I believe these sample characteristics significantly influenced the interview responses and thus my conclusions.

I planned to conduct around 10 interviews but left room to do more based on the point of thematic saturation. The final sample size was determined by how many people responded to my interview request.

3.3 Logistics

All interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom and recorded with emailed or verbal consent. Although online interviews often leave more room for disruption and miscommunication, they were more feasible than in-person interviews given the pandemic context and the planners' geographic spread. Interviews mostly lasted around 45 minutes and ranged from about 30 minutes to 75 minutes.

3.4 Sample Characteristics

Out of the 11 interview sessions, nine were individual interviews (i.e., one interviewee) and two were paired interviews (i.e., two interviewees together). Out of the 13 interviewees, eight were city planners, four were county planners, and one worked specifically on climate preparedness. Twelve of the 13 interviewees responded to a follow-up survey about their background. The following descriptions are based on the 12 survey responses, though not all interviewees responded to all questions. Eleven respondents who responded to the question identified as White or Caucasian. Interviewees' ages ranged from 38 to 63 years old, with an average of 50.1 years and a median of 50 years. For political affiliation or leaning, two identified as liberal, one as democrat, one as democratic but leaning independent, one as independent, one as moderate, and one "depends on which way the wind blows"; others did not answer. For religious or spiritual belief system, two identified as a form of Christian (Protestant and Greek Orthodox), one as agnostic, and two as "none"; others did not answer. These statistics suggest that my results and conclusions may primarily reflect perspectives of an older, White, and democrat/liberal or independent/moderate subsection of the planner population. The interviewees' own race was not a part of any of the conversations, and political and religious/spiritual leaning was mentioned once each.

Six interviewees' job titles were Manager, three were Planner, two were Director, one was Interim Director, and one was not specifically related to planning. Five had AICP certification, and seven did not. They had spent a range of eight to 33 years in the planning field (excluding the person who did not identify as a planner), with an average of 21.5 years and a median of 24 years. They had spent a range of six to 51 years living in the community they currently worked for, with an average of 25 years and a median of 22 years. They had been employed by their current local

government for a range of 2.5 to 31 years, with an average of 14.75 years and a median of nine years. Seven interviewees had spent almost their entire planning career working for their current employing government. Three interviewees had lived their entire or almost entire lives in the community they currently worked for, and three had lived about half their lives in the community they currently worked for. These statistics indicate that my sample leaned towards a more experienced and more rooted subsection of the planner population.

Six identified their communities as urban, one as suburban, three as rural, one as a mix of urban and rural, and two as a mix of the three. Those who answered a mix were all county planners.

Table 1. Anonymous information about the 13 interviewees

Identifier	Community Type	Gender	Age*	Years in Planning*	Years Living in Community*	Job Title	AICP	Community Character
I1	City	Male	40	10	10	Planner	Yes	Urban
I2	City	Female	40	10	10	Interim Director	Yes	Urban
I3	City	Female	50	20	30	Manager	No	Urban
I4	City	Female	65	30	40	Planner	No	Urban
I5	City	Female	45	15	10	Director	Yes	Rural
I6	City	Male	50	25	-	Manager	Yes	Urban
I7	City	Female	-	-	-	Manager	-	Rural
I8	City	Male	50	25	30	Planner	-	Urban
O1	County	Female	50	-	20	Not Planner	No	Urban, suburban, and rural
O2	County	Male	60	35	50	Manager	No	Mix of urban, suburban, and rural
O3	County	Male	50	30	50	Manager	No	Suburban
O4	County	Male	-	20	15	Manager	No	Rural
O5	County	Male	60	30	5	Director	Yes	Urban and rural

*Rounded to the nearest five years for privacy in the table only. The averages and medians were calculated based on the actual responses.

3.5 Analysis

To begin the analysis phase, I watched all the recorded interviews and revised the transcripts generated by Zoom. Then, I read through the transcripts and picked out significant ideas and quotes to generate an initial set of themes.

Next, I created a series of text documents, one each for my main interview questions. I put all the related responses from each interviewee into the corresponding documents. For each question, I picked out common themes between interviewees' responses and summarized them at the top of the document.

I also created a visual analysis tool on Miro, an online whiteboard. For each interview question, I drew a circle, color-coded by the theme of the question, such as planners' roles or ethics and values. Each circle contained a sticky note with a unique color for each interviewee. For the main questions, I summarized that interviewee's response to the question on their respective sticky note. Figure 3-3 is a screenshot of this work.

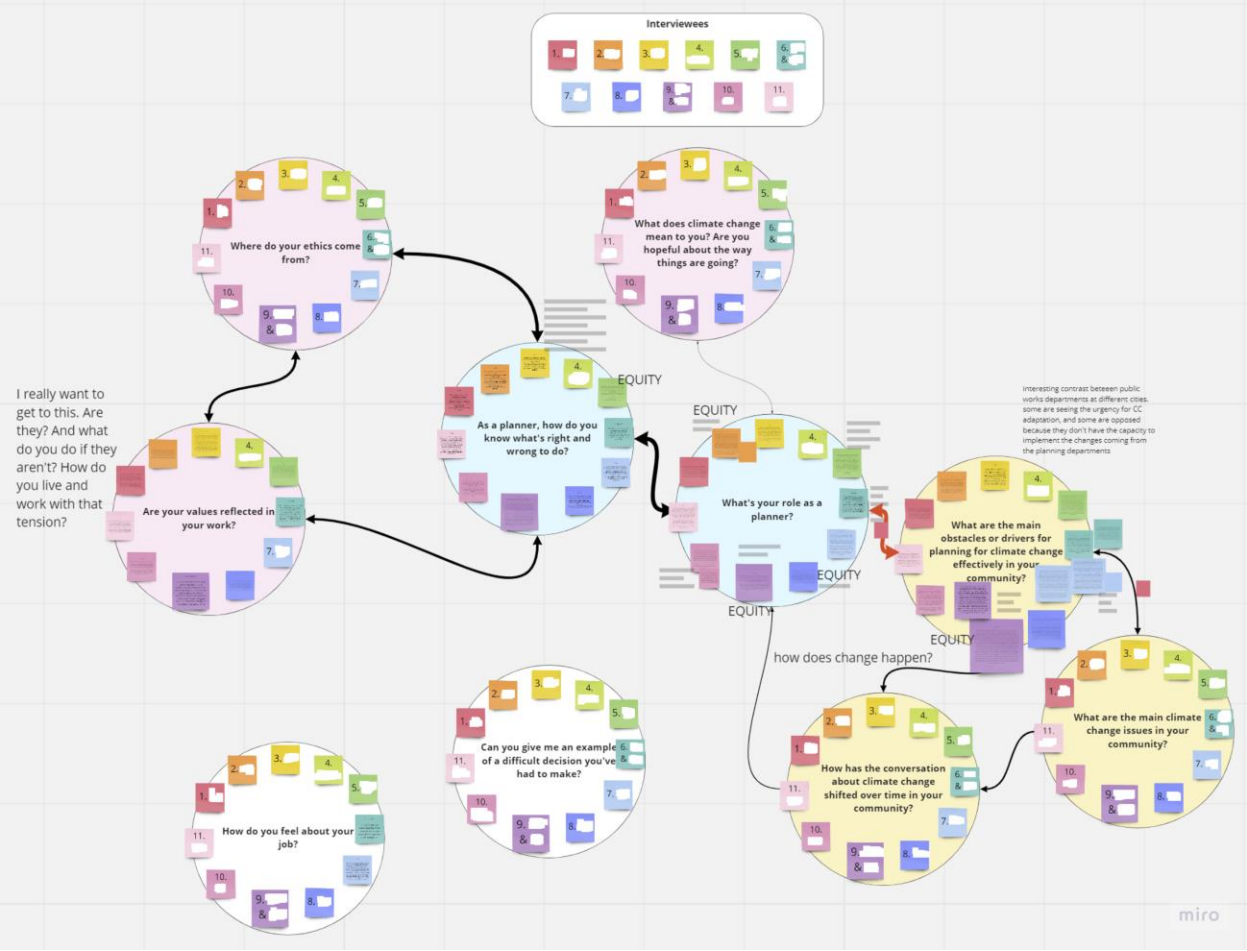

Figure 3-1. Miro board screenshot, with portions whited-out to preserve anonymity

3.6 Limitations

Due to my small sample size and non-probabilistic sampling methods, my findings may be limited in validity and reliability, and they are certainly not generalizable (external validity) to the broader planner population in these cities and counties, much less Washington State and larger scales. The conversations that formed the basis of my research were also situated in time and place and all the social, political, and cultural dimensions of their contexts. Readers should be aware of these caveats when interpreting the results and conclusions.

3.6.1 *Validity*

As in any qualitative interview, the presence of the researcher alone influences the participant's responses (Kartch 2017, 1075). Although this influence is not inherently good or bad, it is a factor that limits the internal and external validity of the study's findings. Since I was not looking to generalize the findings to other contexts (external validity), I was primarily concerned about the issue of internal validity, that is, whether the respondent was truthful and accurate in their responses. Values and beliefs can be a sensitive topic, so even though respondents voluntarily participated in this study, they may not have divulged their thoughts and opinions with complete honesty. Also, participants may have simply been unable to accurately identify their true motivations or beliefs, or they may have unintentionally distorted them through reflection and verbal expression.

To some extent, my analysis explicitly addressed what I perceived to be inaccuracies, distortions, and inconsistencies in my interviewees' responses, but clearly, I am not able to assert the accuracy of my own interpretations, as I am also limited by my personal biases, preconceptions, and subjectivities. Although complete resolution of this conundrum is impossible, especially since I was the sole researcher, I strived to be transparent and thorough in describing my assumptions and rationales for claims and conclusions. In the Stories section of the Findings chapter, I also included large chunks of lightly edited transcript excerpts so that readers can determine for themselves the meaning of my interviewees' words, though recognizing that readers do not have the benefit of the whole context of the conversation.

3.6.2 *Reliability*

A different researcher would likely have elicited different narratives (from the same participants) and interpreted them differently. Although I believe this is a feature and not a bug of

the qualitative interview and the qualitative analysis, the high degree of dependence on context and interpretation limits the reliability of my results over time (test-retest reliability) and between readers of the same interview transcripts (inter-rater reliability) (“Research Reliability” n.d.).

Chapter 4. Findings

The Findings chapter includes three sections: 1) a summary of common climate issues mentioned by interviewees, 2) a synthesis of participants' responses to four key questions, and 3) three sets of extended transcript excerpts that each tells a compelling story about central themes from the interviews.

4.1 Common Climate Issues

Figure 4-1. Word cloud of common climate change issues, created with https://www.wordclouds.com/.

Overwhelmingly, the most prominent family of issues mentioned was related to water, reflecting the geographic context of my sample of interviewees. The most common issues were flooding (coastal, riverine, and stormwater), precipitation (rainstorms, snowstorms), shoreline management, sea level rise, and the availability of water (particularly drinking water). Issues of water rights (between farmers and tribes, between farming and fishing) and water usage for agriculture also came up.

Besides water, some themes in common (mentioned at least twice) were electrification (transportation and buildings), wildfire and smoke, growth management and sprawl, maintaining or increasing vegetation, landslides, public health (particularly air quality), heat, emergency management, industrial emissions, and green purchasing. Issues of supply chain disruption, waste reduction, and mental health due to climate change were each mentioned once. Figure 4-1 shows a word cloud of all the issues mentioned. The largest word (flooding) was mentioned eight times, and the smallest words were each mentioned once.

It is important to note that the issues mentioned were focused on the *adaptation to* rather than the *mitigation of* climate change. The former means dealing with the impacts of climate change, such as increased flooding and wildfires. The latter means slowing climate change itself, such as through decreasing energy usage powered by fossil fuels. Although impacts of climate change are already broadly felt and require action, even in the relatively spared Pacific Northwest, it is imperative that all communities also do as much as possible to slow or stop climate change so that they do not keep increasing local and global burdens of adaptation.

The question, then, is, what is being done and is it enough? The answer to this question is clear: report after report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations Environment Programme, and other authoritative sources shows that at least as a global community, we are not doing enough to reach the Paris Agreement target, and multi-species communities around the world are suffering the costly consequences of that delay. So, why aren't we doing more if it's not enough? The following Key Questions section attempts to answer this question in context of Western Washington.

4.2 Key Questions

The subsections in this section progress from a more professional and objective tone to a more personal and subjective nature. Each subsection summarizes planners' responses to a key interview question. The first question asks what planners think are the key drivers and obstacles to climate action in their local community (city or county). The second question asks what roles planners think they play as a profession. The third question asks how planners know what is right or wrong to do in their job. Lastly, the fourth question asks whether planners' personal beliefs are aligned with their professional duties and those around them at work.

4.2.1 *What Are the Main Drivers and Obstacles to Climate Action in Your Community?*

The top five factors that planners agreed were important in driving or stalling climate action were, in order of level of concurrence: 1) money, 2) support from elected officials, 3) appropriate messaging, 4) seeing real-life impacts, and 5) state mandates. They have significant interrelationships as well, as shown in Figure 4-2.

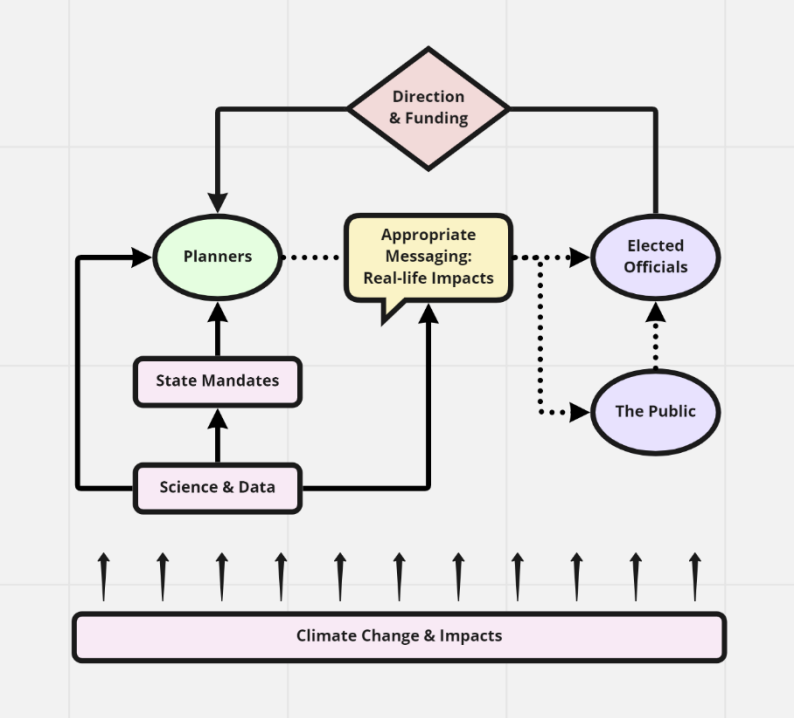

Figure 4-2. Relationship diagram between the top drivers and obstacles, based on interview responses

In general, these interrelationships can be described as such: climate change and its impacts are captured through scientific methods as data and consolidated into knowledge. Legislators at the state level use this knowledge to write laws, some of which mandate action at the local level, which is the site for my research. At the local level, which includes city and county governments but is simplified as one level here, planners receive direction from state mandates and suggest policies and regulations. Elected officials, who are in part responsive to public opinion, also give planners direction and funding to conduct their work. Depending on the community, elected officials' input can be high-level, specific, or somewhere in between. When elected officials are not immediately supportive of planners' proposals, planners can tailor their messaging to try to convince elected officials of the importance of certain plans and programs. In the context of climate change, pointing to real-life impacts in the local community can be powerful and persuasive. Lastly, planners also interact with members of the public, such as through development review

and engagement for long-term planning visions. Through these communications, planners can hear and ease public concerns about certain planning activities, and planners can influence individuals' understanding of what planning and climate change mean for them personally and for the community as a whole.

Next, I elaborate on each of the five key factors.

4.2.1.1 State mandates and support from elected officials

According to my interviewees, the starting point to determine whether a climate action will be taken is whether there is a state mandate to do it. If there *is* a state mandate, the city or county would have to implement the changes locally, whether there is political support or not. If elected officials are still reluctant, planners are able to take advantage of the lack of choice at the local level. One planner [I7] used the mandate to incorporate Best Available Science as an example: "in a way, [the mandate is] nice for smaller communities like ours, where if we didn't have a state mandate, the political will to do that simply wouldn't be there." Figure 4-3 shows a simplified decision flowchart that represents whether an action will be taken, given the presence or absence of a state mandate.

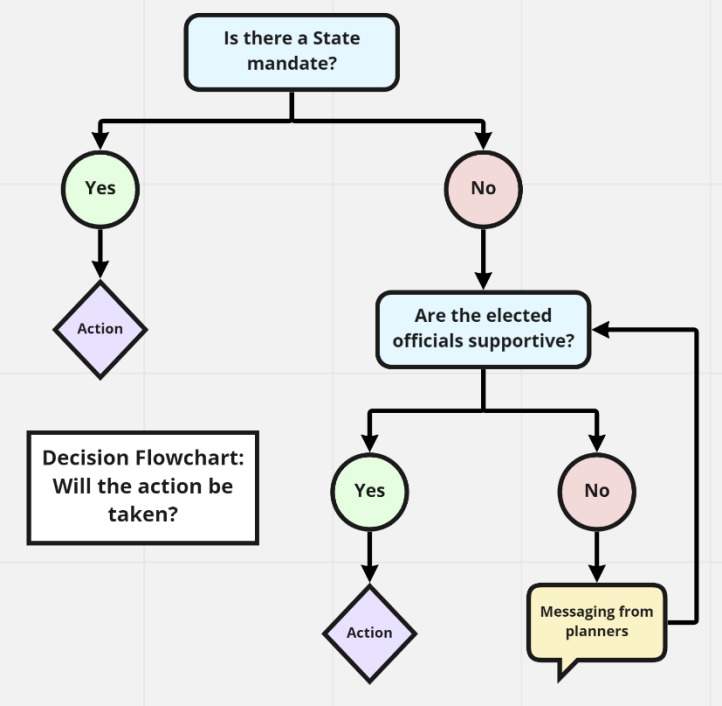

Figure 4-3. Decision flowchart for whether an action will be taken, based on the presence or absence of a state mandate

If there is *no* state mandate for an action, but elected officials are supportive of the action, planners have a much easier time asking for money to hire staff, conduct analyses, and recommend policies. If elected officials are *not* supportive of climate action, however, planners must "sell" the idea, often on a case-by-case basis through messaging that resonates with their particular communities. One planner [O2] highlighted this difficulty of proposing new regulations in the absence of a supporting mandate at the state or federal level:

> If the planners are *proposing* changes to make to policy and regulations, our best opportunity is to provide a convincing case, provide the facts, and do presentations to our elected officials that make it compelling and make it something that they think is important and should ultimately be adopted into our policies and codes. … And that's a tough road to go down when you have opposition. That's why **it's always easier if it's resolved at a federal or state level**. It makes it so much easier for us to come and say, hey we sort of have to do this to some degree and here's the best way we think it can work in our community, and then we present that to the elected officials.

Although public support was not explicitly noted by many planners as a factor, it is at least implicitly necessary since elected officials must represent and reflect the interests of their constituents (or at least appear to do so). One planner [I6] who made this clear said, "Certainly the grassroots advocacy has played a big role. … Planning is a political process in many ways, and there's no doubt that politicians—rightfully so—are at some level responsive to their constituency. So as the community heightens its interest in certain things, the Council similarly does that, and then the city organization shifts to address those things as well."

4.2.1.2 Appropriate messaging: real-life impacts and science

A few planners mentioned avoiding terms such as "climate change," "global warming," and "Best Available Science" and instead using "community resilience" as the framing and pointing to recent events (such as the November 2021 floods in Western Washington) as support for why a policy or regulatory change is necessary. For example, one [O4] said that climate change is a "loaded term," so talking about actual issues and pointing out vulnerabilities resonate better with their community. Another [I1] said that their community looks at climate change "from a resiliency perspective" and frames it as "how can we help each other, how can we make sure people have what they need," so people can relate to the issue in a less political and more personal and neighborly way.

Another interviewee [O5] mentioned how recent events helped to call people's attention to the impacts of climate change and to demonstrate the need for action, even among more conservative elected officials:

> Events like these atmospheric rivers and these floods and these droughts are going to, I think, I hope, get people's attention. We've already heard from some of our more conservative—what I would label more likely anti-planning, you know—electeds that don't want to spend money on hiring more planning staff necessarily to do more permits

> or to have more regulations, but if there's a model that could help us devise a system or devise something that will improve things for people, yeah they'll support that.

Beyond framing climate change as a community resilience issue and pointing to recent events that feel visceral and urgent to people in their community, another key part of the messaging is showing evidence through data and modeling. Although interviewees all understood the global, national, and state implications of climate change and the clarity of the science at those scales, some [O3, O5] noted that it is up to local governments to understand *local* impacts, workshop solutions with the community, and implement those solutions. Thus, there was some complexity around whether science was a driver or an obstacle.

On one hand, one planner [O3] said that climate science is evolving quickly, so there is a lot of push from the public "to move the needle at a faster clip than maybe the politics want to go there." However, planners still need to figure out how to translate science into policy and into implementable actions (such as development regulations), so it seems that science is ahead of policy. For example, policy makers need to decide when to make wording choices that have different legal implications, such as choosing "we *should*" versus "we *shall*." On the other hand, another planner [O5] said that there are still significant data gaps and that models are built on outdated and inaccurate data, so planners lack the granular technical information to be able to demonstrate the legitimacy of proposed regulations.

Although the two planners here seem to have different opinions on whether the science is ahead of or behind the will to act, they share the sentiment that more information about local-level impacts and about the necessity and effectiveness of various options would be beneficial to climate action at the local level. With more accurate modeling, the latter planner [O5] had "some optimism" that they could use "better tools to help guide those conversations" about climate change impacts in the future. Indeed, as another interviewee [I5] described, when the available

information aligns with impacts seen in real life, they feel more confident in their recommendations and benefit from having tangible evidence when enforcing regulations.

4.2.1.3 Money: funding and capacity

Even when the crucial political support and scientific information are available, however, there is the next barrier of funding the necessary steps towards climate action. From hiring staff to replacing infrastructure to requiring new development regulations, **everything costs money**. One planner [I3] summed it up this way: "The resistance most fundamentally—whether you're a government, whether you're a business, whether you're an individual—is money."

One county planner [O3] acknowledged that when they propose policies at the county level, they think about whether cities—especially smaller jurisdictions—will have the staff capacity, time, and money to implement them:

> The county in general has a large amount of resources that it can allocate towards these issues around climate change, … [but] what we've heard from some of our smaller communities is, … "We know we need to do something for climate change, but we don't see how we can execute it because there's just one or two of us." … The challenge becomes … that implementation piece. … **Who's going to implement the solution? How much is it going to cost to implement the solution?** It's easy to say, well, so and so is going to do it, but then you go to that other person and they go like, well that's not in my job description to implement that you know [laughs]. Or, well, that's going to cost, you know, a million dollars. Where are we going to come [up] with a million dollars?

Some planners also connected the money and capacity issue to being realistic and managing expectations from climate advocates, either individuals or in organized groups. While some interviewees [I4, I8, I1] recognized the positive influence from those community members, others [I2, O3] pushed back on the more aggressive calls for action. In the latter camp, one [O3] said,

> It's kind of like that analogy, that **a half a loaf of bread is better than no loaf of bread**, and it's sometimes starting small. But there's a whole other group of people out there that will react very negatively to that and they'll be like, what do you mean start small? We're already 10 years too late. We can't start small, we have to go big, go big or go home, and

> the go home means you know, the end of the planet. … It takes work, it takes some compromise, it takes, you know, say, well, what if we do this? Thinking about trade-offs.
>
> The other planner in that camp [I2] expressed similar sentiments:
>
> **You have to be really careful that advocacy groups don't get sort of this runaway imagination.** … We have to have an open and engaged process, but we also can't commit to things that just aren't feasible from a money and a capacity perspective. **We're extremely under-resourced** in this city. … A lot of climate advocates feel like we can't lose a second, … so it puts a lot of strain on us when we're like, we plan the plan! Like we take two years to tee up a comprehensive plan periodic update. … **Things don't happen overnight**.

4.2.2 *What is the Planner's Role?*

The previous subsection hinted at several points of intervention from planners. One is the use of **messaging** in influencing elected officials and public opinion. Another is the planner's **orientation towards change**—whether they support more incremental or more aggressive action, and whether they feel responsible for encouraging more climate action. This subsection discusses these two factors in the context of the role of planners in advancing climate action.

Overwhelmingly, planners talked about two functions of planning: **to educate** through digestible, audience-appropriate information [9: O3, I8, I7, O5, I3, I5, I4, O4, O2] and **to balance** competing goals and interests by facilitating conversation and seeing the big picture [7: O3, I5, I8, I6, O5, I3, I4]. Planners also often tied these two roles together, whereby it's necessary to first educate the audience to build some level of shared understanding, such as on climate impacts and the purpose of certain regulations, in order for different parties to then find common ground.

4.2.2.1 Role 1: Educating elected officials and the public

Planners' role to educate applied to both **elected officials**, who were often described as the ultimate decision makers, and **the public** at large. For elected officials, interviewees highlighted the role of planners in providing factual information so decision makers can make fully informed

choices. In the context of climate change, it is especially crucial to be able to understand the science and to translate technical information into digestible points, and one interviewee [I5] mentioned translating engineering documents into graphics that are more legible to laypeople. There was also a shared but non-explicit belief that **information, facts, and science are key to making good decisions**. One planner [I3] said that "people are reasonable for the most part [laughs], and if they get all the facts in front of them, hopefully they will be able to make decisions for the greater good."

Yet, the same planner [I3] later implicitly questioned **whether information is neutral**. In their words, "*how* you present the information and how *much* information you present absolutely affects the discussion" [I3]. On one hand, a couple of planners [I7, O3] said it's important to use messaging that is most easily accepted by the audience and to sell an issue "in subtle ways," especially when there is no political will or when widespread opposition can be expected. On the other hand, one planner [I3] argued that it's important to talk about impacts and relate issues under the umbrella of climate change so that conversations are not kept in silos. Another planner [I4] said that planners "can be agents of change" in shifting the conversation about climate change by permeating conversations—both official and personal—with climate change issues. Thus, the decision to be explicit about climate change likely depends on the community and their readiness in tackling climate change head-on.

For the public at large, one planner [I5] highlighted planners' role as **communicators** to convey the city government's larger goals to individuals with particular interests: "being able to be that person that explains to maybe somebody who's been a dairy farmer [or] crop farmer their whole life, and to give them the perspective of [the city], … it's a little bit like explaining it to my dad [laughs]." Interviewees indicated that as city or county employees, they act as and are

perceived by the public as representatives of the local government. Therefore, they are often responsible for explaining and representing the position of the government to set and enforce certain regulations. For example, the previous planner [I5] said it is their job to explain the validity of codes and regulations (such as the Land Development Code and the Comprehensive Plan goals) to the public, and another [O3] said that it involves some "sales job" to convey to the public that there is no "wiggle room" when it comes to the Growth Management Act, the adopted Comprehensive Plan, or federal laws.

4.2.2.2 Role 2: Balancing competing goals and interests

The second most-cited role centered on seeing the big picture of how different needs interacted and facilitating conversations to find common ground and compromises. Two planners [O3, I5] mentioned the "balancing act" explicitly, and two [O3, I8] mentioned needing "compromises." One [O3] described compromises with the analogy, "half a loaf of bread is better than no loaf of bread."

Overall, interviewees described themselves as the "generalist," [I6] "diplomat," [I8] or "neutral party" [I3] that "brings different perspectives together" [I5] and "facilitate a conversation" [O5, I6] about the "pros and cons" of various options [I6] and "to find consensus" [O5] on the best solution that "at least a majority of people can accept" [O3]. In this role, planners take input from a broad public [O3] and keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to better the whole community or even the world [I4]. Therefore, the solutions need to "deal with cumulative impacts" and not just be "short-term solutions" [O5].

One planner [I8] summarized the role of the planner as being "always in the middle, always in diplomacy":

> The perfect metric of your ability as a **diplomat** is to arrive at something that everybody's a little upset with. … **Everyone kind of has to be a little bit pissed off** or a little irritated or a little bit of hey, … I didn't get everything I wanted. And if that's how things end on a complicated issue, … you've done your job, … you've really kind of hit the mark on achieving everybody's interest, because it's very rare these days that [we] work on anything where everybody gets everything they want. It's not possible right.

One planner [O2] stressed the importance of finding common ground with people who are not ready to accept the science and urgency of climate change, by listening and talking to one another and by relating the abstract and often politicized idea of climate change to tangible real-life impacts:

> A lot of us in the planning field are open and we understand the impacts of climate change, … but you gotta remember a lot of the public is not. They just hear what they see on CNN or Fox or whatever news outlet they're plugged into, and that's the extent of their "research," if you will. … [This] may sound bureaucratic, but **nothing will stop discussion further than coming in like we got to do this or nothing.** We have to talk to each other and bring each other around and listen to why they think [climate change is] complete nonsense. … **With dialogue and civil discourse, we can find some common areas that make sense**, if you can tie it back to the two inches of rain we just saw in the last day and a half.

Four planners [I5, I3, O5, I7] mentioned that planners not only try to see the big picture themselves, but they also try to **help *others* see the big picture** and understand that despite having different needs and interests, people could still have common goals. For example, one [I7] said, "I do enjoy when I see people kind of coming to understand okay, we're working on this collaboratively, and it's likely that we do have some common goals. The folks that were very upset with us this morning, we do have common goals with them. I don't think we brought them around this morning [laughs], but maybe we will after a couple more conversations." This big-picture perspective is especially critical to establish for decision makers. One planner [I3] said they try to "impress on whoever is making direction or decisions [that] you're not deciding this for yourself, **you are deciding this for everybody**. And when you try to help people put that hat on, it sometimes will change the way they think and what they decide." Two planners said that even if

they can't get through to an opposing party, they can be a "sounding board" for people to react to the information presented [I3] or at least be someone to vent to and hear people's concerns [I5].

It should be noted that the "bigger picture" discussed by interviewees usually draws the line around a specific community—most often their employing city or county. If planners' role to find common ground only applies to a local community, it is possible that the perspectives they include in their balancing of interests would not necessarily reflect what is "better" for the larger world beyond that community. This idea will be further explored in the Discussion chapter.

4.2.2.3 Extent of planners' power

Beyond their roles to educate and to find common ground, many planners seemed to think they have limited power in influencing the final decision on whether a climate action (or any action) is taken. Three interviewees [I6, O5, O2] explicitly stated that planners are not the decision makers, at least for the "big" decisions. Another [I3] said, whether the decision maker is a community group, city council, or someone high up the chain on the private side, "you're there to provide information. If they ask for your opinion, great, but if not, it's trying to, again, get all the facts in front of them so they can make fully informed decisions that are hopefully for the greater good."

Two planners [I7, O2] pointed out the difference in the amount of power held by planners between the two broad types of planning: **current planning** and **long-range planning**. This is often how planning duties are divided into divisions at the city and county levels. In current planning, also referred to as the permitting side or the quasi-judicial role, planners' function is fairly straightforward: to ensure that proposed developments are code compliant [I7]. Planners have very limited power to make changes in this role, other than to make recommendations to the County hearing examiner [O2].

At the legislative level, however, planners can "plant the seeds" and advocate in their limited way [I7] by making a case for changing some policy or regulation [O2]. One planner [I7] contrasted these two roles this way:

> We hear this often from developers, … "Do you support this project or not?" And my response is always, **it is not my role to support your project or not. My role is to ensure you are code compliant**, and it'll either be approved or denied on that basis. I don't cast judgment. It's very black and white. You either meet the code or you don't, and that's really in your project-specific or quasi-judicial role, right? It's very, here are my boundaries and I have to operate within these. And if I'm operating outside of them, the penalty is that I could cause the city to be sued and public taxpayer money is going to be spent. …
>
> However, when you step outside of that quasi-judicial [role], and you're in more of the legislative setting, … I don't want to say it's political, but in a way it definitely is, where … we start to plant the seeds. … **In our very limited way, we *can* advocate** … to start taking those little baby steps.

By and large, planners did not see themselves as political actors and rejected an outright "political" role [I7, I5, I6]. However, as the previous quote indicated at the end, five planners [I7, O3, I2, O5, I3] said that planners *can* sometimes advocate for certain paths, with the recognition that they are not the only voice in the mix. Only one planner [O4] said explicitly that their role is to raise awareness about an issue, not to advocate for any one path. They reasoned that if elected officials decide that an issue is important to them, they will make it their own priority.

Two planners [I7, O3] described planners' role in context of the Growth Management Act, which has no particular order or priority between the 14 goals. Therefore, it is up to the local community to decide how to prioritize them. These two planners said that sometimes, the job of identifying priorities is delegated to the planning staff. One of them [O3] tied this role of balancing goals to the role of educating the public and to the role of implementing guiding policies from the state, region, and county. In the process of fulfilling these roles, **planners practice some level of discretion** and may take a position that aligns with the guiding policies. In their words,

> As planners, as we approach these issues, we oftentimes find ourselves caught in between the public or the community at large who views an issue in a—I'll call it kind of in a biased

> way or a passionate way. And **a part of the challenge is to educate the public that we have this framework of the Act**, we have these goals that aren't in any particular order, so **as individual planners, it's part of our job to sort of balance all of these goals**, that we can't just kind of arbitrarily pick and choose which goals we think are … better … [or] more popular, that we have to look at an issue on balance, and we have to look at it from all sides.
>
> That doesn't mean that we're not going to come down with a recommendation, that we're always just going to be in a facilitation role on a particular issue. … **We may be advocates, we may take a position.** That position is typically grounded in consistency with the Growth Management Act, with … the Puget Sound Regional Council Vision 2050, as well as our own countywide planning policies and our Comprehensive Plan policy. … **It is a balancing act.** … If there was an easy answer, I probably would be out of a job [laughs].

Notably, four interviewees brought up ideas related to **equity** in their role as a planner, without relevant prompts from me. One mentioned reaching "underrepresented communities" [O3], one highlighted thinking of "the most vulnerable" [I5], and one called for helping "people who can't help themselves," "the poorest," and the "marginalized" [I4].

Lastly, two planners mentioned **managing change** as one of planners' roles. One [O3] said it is their job to tell people that what has worked so far will not keep working, and that planners can prepare people for change because they are looking 20 years out. The other [O5] mentioned needing "adaptive management" because everything is changing so quickly. In a way, both climate change and social equity have to do with people's evolving understandings about the world and shifting social perceptions about what is important and salient among the broader public. In the latter interviewee's words,

> **Change is inevitable**, and that's the message we deliver back to our electeds every opportunity we get. This is our best guess or our best recommendation today to address these issues, but the way things are going, and the way technology is and social changes and all of that, things can change much quicker than they ever had in the past, … so that whole **adaptive management** thing is constantly now on our plate.

In summary, interviewees' perceptions about the extent of planners' power seemed to fall along two axes: the **level of desire** and the **amount of perceived power** they have to exert influence over the final decision. Interviewees tended to fall low on both axes, and the two axes

seem to have a positive relationship, whereby someone with a higher level of desire to exert influence also perceive themself to have more power to do so. This is perhaps because they more actively look for various ways to do so than someone who does not wish to exert influence. In the Discussion chapter, I will make the normative argument that planners *should* try to influence decision makers by encouraging climate action because it is their professional duty.

4.2.3 *How Do Planners Know What Is Right or Wrong to Do?*

4.2.3.1 "We don't"

To the question of how planners know what is right or wrong to do, seven planners answered some version of "we don't," there is "no right answer," or there is a "gray area" that requires case-by-case judgment [O3, O4, I6, O5, I5, I8, I4]. This kind of response reflects a degree of latitude that planners have in their work in dictating the outcome. The perceived magnitude of this latitude varies between planners, but most interviewees agreed that planners do and need to exercise some individual judgment in their work because there is not always a single right answer.

Six planners said that having **data** and being well informed help them arrive as close to a right answer as possible [O3, O4, I6, O5, I4, I3]. For example, one [O4] said that they try to be as informed as they can, but ultimately, there is no clear answer to what is right:

> You can read, you can get as informed and educated as you can about an issue and make sure that you've done your due diligence, to make sure that you've given the decision makers as much information as they need to make the right decision. I know that's kind of canned, but like [laughs] **there's not much else you can do other than to work hard to give people an entire or full picture of the information.**
>
> And I think **the more you get that full picture, the more you actually need to question whether you think it's the right thing or not**, right, **everything is not black and white**. There's a lot of gray in between, and I think the more you get educated about a subject and you get perspective from a lot of different places, the more you actually go, well, I don't know what is going to be right. I know what *this* thing says, I know what *that* thing says, I know how this worked the way they did it at *that* time, but I don't know if it's going to work *here*.

4.2.3.2 Ethics and the public interest

Four planners explicitly called out "**ethics**" as a guiding post, which they used to mean acting in the **public interest** [I7, O2], being **accountable** to the public to do the right thing [I7, I8], and always keeping their "principles" in mind for "why" they do this work [I2]. In response to my question of how planners know what is right or wrong to do, one planner [I7] showed me a framed piece of paper and said,

> You probably have the book *Everyday Ethics for Practicing Planners*. … This is just a little part of it that I have here: "The ethical planner is self-determining. Despite the influence of others, the ethical planner is accountable for their actions. We recognize errors in judgment. And as a family of planners and service to the public, **an ethical planner embraces obligations to others**." The reason I keep this on my wall—literally where I look at it every day—is that for me, when I'm making decisions, it is where **I'm a public servant, and I use my best judgment to serve the public**.
>
> Sometimes, especially in smaller communities, there's a perception that as planners, we work for developers, … and actually the exact opposite is true. And actually, I have another little thing that I keep framed that says, "We do not work for developers, we work for the public." We have to always keep that in the forefront of our mind that we are helping to make decisions to build neighborhoods, to build infrastructure that will serve the public, versus being a little bit cheaper for a developer, because frankly I could care less [laughs].

4.2.3.3 Individual judgment

Several planners implied a **two-step process of determining what is right or wrong**, but two [O3, I4] explicitly stated that they start with the basis of written codes and regulations, and that what is right or wrong is already written in law. Beyond that, however, planners noted different ways of deciding what is right or wrong, including listening to others and the community [I4, I3, I6], an individual judgment of what is "reasonable" [I8, I3], a personal "gut check" [O3, I3], honoring the AICP code of ethics [I2, I4], and "balancing" needs or doing a "cost-benefit analysis" of what would most benefit the larger community [I5, I4]. See Figure 4-4 for a simple representation.

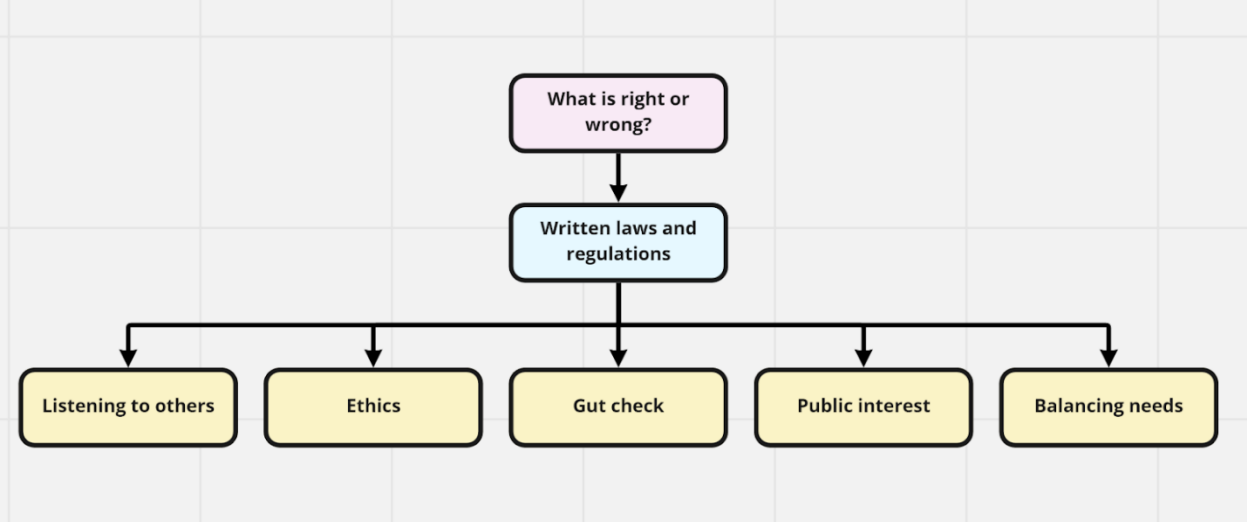

Figure 4-4. How planners determine what is right or wrong

One planner [I8] implied that planners can often make a choice between following the letter of the law or the spirit of the law:

> We are sometimes left with the choice of, do what the rule says exactly, or exercise some latitude and interpret the rule. … A lot of times, **we have the ability to interpret or flex a rule** to be able to achieve perhaps a bit better end product than what the rule would otherwise allow, if we were just straight and narrow.

Three planners [O2, I4, I3] said that they try to put their personal feelings aside in their professional role, both because they think personal beliefs should not override considering the whole community [O2, I4], and because they know that they are not the final decision makers, so they can't expect their opinion to prevail [O2, I3]. For the former reason, one [O2] said,

> I might actually *completely* agree with this one side of the camp or the other, but I have to pull myself back and try to consider the whole community and make decisions in the best public interest, sometimes against my own personal beliefs. If I get my own personal beliefs in there, I think that's wrong. Sometimes they line up, sometimes they don't. I didn't get paid, **I did not get hired to be a crusader for my personal beliefs.**

Because planners don't always have all the information they need and there is not always a clear answer to what they should do, planners sometimes need to act in uncertainty. Planners disagreed *verbally* about whether planners should use individual judgment and whether personal

beliefs should play a role in their job: some explicitly endorsed it, some did not but implied it, while some rejected it in principle. Yet, whether they outwardly supported individual judgment or not, their responses seemed to imply that their jobs *require* it because uncertainty and disagreement are inherent to planning. Therefore, some individual judgment is necessary.

4.2.3.4 Varied interpretations of right and wrong

If planners are forced to exercise personal judgment, what are the bases for their judgment? Perhaps even more interestingly, what do they say outwardly is their basis, and does that match their actual basis when making decisions? Short of a mind-reader or an observational study, I can only make an educated guess—as planners say—based on the interviews and the stories told to me.

One planner's responses demonstrated this tension [I8]: they said that for them personally, "I have a good sense between what's required, practical, and reasonable. … If something's wrong, I have a pretty easy time saying no, … so I guess I feel like **it's a pretty bright line between right and wrong**." Yet, later in the conversation, they also said,

> There's times where the wrong thing to do would be to let your personal interests … [be] contrary to what you're supposed to be doing. … You know, I don't *like* that person, I don't *like* this project. … [In the past,] we did have individuals who sort of inflicted their individual interests on certain projects, … you know, "*I* think it should be this." … Planning is a fluffy sort of gray world. … **There are lots of opportunities** … **where the "I think" can creep in**.

There seems to be a discrepancy here between the "bright line" they personally see between right and wrong, and their disapproval of the "I think" in planning. Although it was unclear to me whether that planner perceived this difference to be a discrepancy, they summed up the tension well: "**Even though we all are working for the same common goal**, which is to make our community a better place to live, boy **there's a wide range of opinions on how to get there**." This highlights the challenge that everyone can strongly believe that they are "right" but still

disagree with each other, meaning that even with the same goal and perhaps even the same set of "facts," people involved in the planning process can have different ideas for what to do. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly lay out what those different ideas are, what worldviews and values underlie them, and to what extent people can find common ground to prevent unsubstantiated "I think's" from driving decisions.

4.2.4 *Are Your Values Reflected in Your Work?*

4.2.4.1 Between planners and elected officials

There was some indication that planners did not necessarily agree with the people they worked for. For example, one [I7] said, "I have at least half of my Council, I am absolutely diametrically on a personal level oppo-, I mean, we couldn't be more different." Another [I5] said, "ultimately at the end of the day, I do work for the Mayor, I do work for City Council, and so it's kind of an uncomfortable position for me to be in sometimes. … Nothing that really ends relationships, but it's my job to continually point out some of those things to them and try to find a, you know, a compromise if possible."

However, interviewees differed in whether they consciously try to bring others closer to their perspective or not. One [I3] explicitly said they do: "my own personal influence on my job has been toward environmental protection. I consider myself a lefty, so working for a conservative construction organization group, I tried to bring them a little closer to the middle in terms of these types of priorities. And then with city government and county government, I have been kind of doing the same, just recognizing that this is an issue that does need to be brought forward." Thus, they expressed that they do try to exert influence on other government actors to try to get them to see the importance of environmental protection. Some interviewees disagreed with this position.

Instead, they contended that it is not their job to try to influence people one way or another. One [O4] said,

> I could run for office and make those decisions, but that's not what I get to do right. … We're supposed to be, you know, factual based and here's the information and you tell us how to move forward with it. And **unfortunately that doesn't always align with what you *want* to do** or you think *should* happen. Most of the time it's just like you know, what information can I give you that will help you to understand the issue the way I do. … [But] the more you try to make people see your side of it, often the less likely they're willing to [laughs] do it because most people—like the Planning Commission—**they don't want your opinions about things. That's not what you're there for.** You're there for you know, the facts and legal issues and their requirements and all those things. The people, the elected officials are there to give you the bias, "this is what I want to have happen." Staff are there, more or less to give "this is what you can do, and this is what you can't do" kind of thing. And they don't always listen to that either.

A notable thing here is that although this planner [O4] didn't think it's their job to "make people see [their] side," they said they think about what information to give to help others "understand the issue the way [they] do." This slight contradiction again highlights the tension between trying to be factual and neutral as an information-provider and the impossibility of neutrality in communication. As previously quoted, "*how* you present the information [and] how *much* information you present absolutely affects the discussion that's had" [I3].

4.2.4.2 Between personal and professional roles

Three planners [I5, I8, I4] said that they have deep personal connections with the community they work in because they have lived there for a long time and/or have family there; therefore, it's hard for them to separate the personal and professional. One of them [I5] said that because they have these personal connections, they can act as a bridge "between the personal and the technical" for the public and to communicate better so that people can come to understand the collaborative nature of planning and to see that there are common goals between different parties. In their words,

> It's interesting like I said to have **roots in the community** and to have kind of that **personal connection** to the people around me and to the land around me. I have uncles that are still farming just outside the city. … I enjoy trying to communicate better, kind of **playing that role between the personal and the technical**. … I continue to learn that it's impossible really to over-communicate. … I do enjoy when I see people kind of coming to understand okay, we're working on this collaboratively, and it's likely that we do have some common goals. … So being able to be that person that explains to maybe somebody who's been a dairy farmer or crop farmer their whole life and to give them the perspective of, this is the city's perspective and what we're trying to accomplish. **It's a little bit like explaining it to my dad** [laughs].

In contrast, two planners [O3, O2] said they try to disconnect their personal beliefs from their professional life. One [O2] said,

> **I really try to disconnect my personal beliefs when I go into my day job**. I think you *have* to. You might have a short career if you try to advocate what you believe. … There's a lot of science that says [the rain] has been accelerated by climate change. *I* think it is, I absolutely think it is, but a lot of people don't. So I can't tell them that and that's the way it's going to be. We have to get there together. So it takes patience, it takes patience. **I have to set aside my personal beliefs and understand the arena I'm working in**, and that is bringing a lot of different ideas to the table—polarized ideas—and try to find a middle ground and hopefully fingers crossed we start making some of these baby steps along the way.
>
> That's frustrating. You know, through a long career, … any given day I could say it was a failure, but looking back over time, I can point to some things, albeit small, that we actually advocated and got them passed. **Do I wish it happened more often, and we did more? Absolutely, personally. But that wasn't my call to make.** If you're looking for quick satisfaction in the planning world, it's glacial. … You gotta focus on the long game and you're not going to get everything you want.

The other [O3] echoed the sentiment that planners are not the ultimate decision-makers, and because of that lack of decision-making power, they don't "internalize" the defeat when things don't go the way they hoped for:

> When I got into this business, you know, I was right out of college, I was young, I was naive, I was energetic, I wanted to be bold. … One of the things you quickly realize is that **we may have a lot of opinions, we may have a lot of desire and passion on an issue, but at the end of the day, I'm not a decision maker per se.** It's up to elected officials; they are making the final decision. … Early on in my career, … [folks gave] me advice [that] you really got to be careful about taking ownership of an issue, and you got to recognize that at the end of the day, the politics may win out and you gotta just kind of walk away from it. You know **if you start doing the little sore loser thing, it can really undermine your psyche in this business**. …

> Are there some things when I'm bummed that it didn't go a certain way? Absolutely, you know, but I think **I don't internalize it** in a way that where you end up in a place like you know, maybe this isn't a good fit for me. Because I have seen colleagues who have gotten you know really wrapped up in a loss. … I think the hardest part for people is, a lot of work oftentimes occurs over a long period of time. … When you invest three years into working on something to only see it discarded at the end, … that first time is a big wake up call.

Interestingly, both of these planners [O2, O3] called out the long timeframe that planners work with, though the former framed it more positively as a "long game" where little wins can accumulate over time to make a difference, whereas the latter framed it more negatively where many years of effort can seem to go to waste.

The latter's [O3] point about not internalizing losses in a way where one could think their job isn't a good fit for them is a notable juxtaposition with another planner's [I3] response. This planner used to work for a "conservative construction organization" before becoming a city planner, and they said,

> If you get to a point in your job where you're feeling, I can't agree with this organization or this government's position, then it becomes the personal discussion with yourself: do I want to keep working here? Do I want to keep representing here? Or do I need to be looking for another way to satisfy this passion that I have for land use planning?

When asked if they had personally felt the need to rethink their employment because they didn't agree with their employing organization, they said,

> It did when I was working for the construction industry. There were several times where they were wanting me to represent a position and advocate on their behalf for something that I personally disagreed with. And I had to think long and hard about what in this position that they're taking can I understand and can I honestly feel like an advocate for. And so what I tried to do was focus on those areas and explain those areas, in particular, to the people I was advocating to. … **I had to do some soul searching**.

Thus, this planner [I3] faced the exact "soul searching" predicament that the previous [O3] warned against. They did indeed question whether the job was "a good fit" because they did not personally agree with the organization. That said, they said that the self-questioning only happened

when they were working for the private construction sector and not as a city planner in the public sector.

4.3 Stories

This last section of the Findings chapter presents several extended excerpts that illustrate the complexity of implementing climate action at the local level and how planners' individual values and ethics influence their role in that process.

Because of the complexities of planning and the intersections between themes described in the previous Key Questions section, I see great value in presenting a story close to its entirety, with all its tensions and contradictions. Thus, I excerpted three particularly illustrative stories below that I think are as interesting to read as they are to analyze. They are interspersed with some commentary and guideposts for where the conversation is heading, but my hope is that readers can also try to decide for themselves what is being conveyed here (though recognizing that readers don't have the benefit of the full context of the interview or the interviewees' voices and gestures).

It is notable that two of the stories I chose for this purpose came out of the only two paired interviews I did. First, this highlights the possible advantages of interviewing two people who know each other professionally well (and potentially personally well) and can fill in the gaps in each other's responses. Second, the energy in a partnership illustrates the power in having at least one colleague who shares one's core beliefs when trying to effect change, whether in the arena of climate change or elsewhere.

4.3.1 *Flooding Woes: Complexities of Floodplain Management*

Climate disasters keep worsening, the science struggles to catch up, and planners don't necessarily have all the information they need to set new regulations. In the meantime,

communities suffer the consequences of inadequate global action, and people want the government to do *something* to alleviate the impacts. Under this pressure, elected officials are prone to find solutions that are visible but short-sighted, because the really effective and cost-effective solutions are harder to get public backing for and are more expensive. The interviewee here is hoping that the recent floods in November 2021 can be a catalyst for a paradigm shift in their county's floodplain management. In the midst of dealing with flooding, there is also the political issue of a water rights conflict between the tribes and the farmers. Responding to all of these issues requires attention, time, and money, and there is no guarantee that spending that time and money is going to result in any satisfactory outcomes.

The main family of themes illustrated by this excerpt is the **drivers and obstacles for climate action** at the county level. The main themes are:

- Local governments need more local-level data to support regulatory changes. Yet, models are based on historic data and therefore inaccurate to predict the future.
- Regulatory changes for new development are not enough. Local governments need to adapt existing development to flooding.
- Studies and plans based on inaccurate modeling gather dust on the shelf. Lots of money went into them but they do not end up getting used.
- There is always public outcry after floods for the government to act. Political pressure drives short-sighted do-something approaches, not long-term solutions that are actually effective and cost-effective, but the latter is also harder to get politically and more expensive upfront.
- Water rights conflicts between farmers and tribes require extensive discussions, which take years and millions of dollars to facilitate.

- Floodplain management is not just a local problem. There are state and federal regulations entangled in it.
- The November 2021 floods could be a harbinger for a paradigm shift in floodplain management.

First, the interviewee set the stage to talk about the County's Shoreline Management Plan. Since scoping it three years ago, the County has been gathering data and modeling impacts on the ground so it can move from policy to regulation:

> We just finished our Shoreline Management Plan update. … We scoped it three years ago, and we know climate change was an emerging issue, but the direction we got from our Council [at that time] was, let's focus on it at the policy level and not at the regulatory level. **We just weren't ready yet for regulations because there were still pretty significant data gaps** [about sea level rise]. … So a lot of it has been kind of doing technical work to get up to speed on that.
>
> We've got what's called the CoSMoS model we're working on with the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] and UO2S [United States Geological Survey] to model storm surge and sea level rise. … We just got a grant from Ecology to now kind of take the next step and take that CoSMoS model and overlay it on the GIS layers and now look at land use. We can look at individual parcels … [using] that resilience approach … and say, do we need to mitigate, *can* we mitigate on particular buildings or properties, should we consider increasing the setbacks, and things like that. But you know, **that's the technical information we need to get down to the granularity on the ground** … **[to] actually recommend changing the setbacks** from X to X, you know, because **now we have the data to support that. Otherwise we don't, and it just becomes very subjective rhetorical discussions and arguments** when you're trying to make those changes with the appointed [and] elected officials and stuff. And so that's kind of been our focus. … We need to be in a data gathering mode right now and focusing on getting as much information as we can. …
>
> So certainly we've looked at the Climate Impacts Group's work from the UW on the North Cascade, and no good news out of any of that for us. … By and large, it's going to mean more water, more water in the winter and less water in the summer and flashing your streams. So as we just saw in November, just boom. Flooding can happen really, really quickly, and probably more often than it has in the past.

Then, they said that modeling flooding in the county is difficult because of the Nooksack River's high sediment load, meaning that the river carries a lot of materials such as sand and silt through its movement. As the river flows downstream, the current deposits those materials on the

riverbed and raises the riverbed, therefore decreasing the volume of water that can be held in the waterway. As a result, flooding is more likely to occur. However, knowing this pattern doesn't necessarily translate to knowledge about when, where, and how much flooding will occur. Thus, the sediment load adds considerable uncertainty to floodplain management in the county.

> So the flooding [in November 2021] in particular really took everybody by surprise. … One of the really interesting things about the Nooksack [River] was that I think it has the second highest sediment load of any river in Puget Sound because it's draining off a volcano, off of Mount Baker. So that is huge amounts of sediment in the river and it's constantly moving sediment and so when the river flooded in November, the gal that runs [the County's river and flood group] was telling me that the models were just way off, … and she said that the difference is, it's sediment that's come down and obviously reduced the capacity of the river or reduced the capacity of the channel to hold water. …
>
> **We had areas flooded that are *well* outside the floodplain.** So again the models just didn't add up, and they're not designed for this kind of stuff. **This kind of stuff was never envisioned and hasn't been seen historically, so it's not going to be reflected in any models that are based on historical data.** … One of your questions was, were we prepared, and **I don't think we're ever prepared.** This happened a couple years ago, what we call the super bowl flood. And this last one kind of dwarfed that. … Now we don't even know how accurate those models are to predict the next flood. …
>
> So that sediment loading thing is what really brings so much uncertainty to how management of the river goes, you know. **You spend a lot of money and you have this big study and we look back, we got years and years and years of sediment load studies**. And you know, **they're the proverbial plans that sit on the shelf** because it gets done and then the laws change and there's a challenge, and you know legal process to it, or something, a hurdle you can't get over or that it's just too risky and so action is taken, and you look for Plan B or Plan C or Plan D, you know.

While farmers want technological fixes to increase the river's storage capacity, the state and federal permits are extremely hard to get because of the impacts to salmon habitat. Small-town mayors, sensitive to the political needs of responding to farmers and constrained by institutional capacity, are wont to look for conspicuous actions that *seem* responsive to constituents yet do not really address the flooding effectively.

> So we're already having calls. The agricultural community has had calls for an increased storage—you know, which is code word for dams. And they don't use that word, but you know—and for renewed dredging of the river, … which technically is allowed. … It requires a shoreline permit, … and it used to be done years ago before the environmental

> laws changed and got more restrictive. But we say the issue isn't *our* permit from the County. The issue is, you have to get state and federal approvals from Fish and Wildlife and from Corps [the United States Army Corps of Engineers]. … And typically the tribes, you know, object to that work because of impacts on salmon habitat.
>
> So that has just kind of been a nonstarter. … No private sector industry or group will take on the risk of doing all that work, which is essentially to work up an Environmental Impact Statement. … Not only is it expensive, but the time it takes, no one is going to take that risk. So it's probably going to have to be a government agency that decides whether or not they will do that, and you know, automatically **you get public outcry, "do *something,*" right, "government, you must do *something*."** …
>
> Even the small town mayors, those towns that got flooded have said "yeah, we know that scraping off some gravel off those gravel bars isn't going to do anything from a flood standpoint, *but* it's going to look like to the public that we did *something*, and that's what they're going to want to see." So **there's a push for that short-term or short-sighted do-something approaches**. And you know it's hard to discourage that at the same time, knowing that the better solutions are *way* longer-term solutions or way harder solutions to get politically, and they're going to cost a lot of money.

In addition, the recent floods in November 2021 have resurfaced conflicts over water rights between farmers and tribes. While the Governor has announced the intention for an adjudication process to quantify water rights in the Nooksack River basin, which would give tribes their rightful priority, the County Executive is proposing an alternative settlement discussion between the farmers and tribes to try to ease the farming community's distress. Yet, the alternative discussion would still take years and millions of dollars to facilitate.

> *Are the political optics a significant barrier?*
>
> Here it is, yeah. And it's complicated, you know. It would be hard enough just in and of itself right, but like "oh well, it's flood protection" right, and then it's "hey people are more important than salmon. Therefore, whatever we do, we should think more about saving people's lives or saving people's property than we do about the health of the salmon."
>
> Okay, that's one argument. But it's complicated here because … we've had low-flow stream issues for a long time here, and those tributaries of the river don't meet their minimum in-stream flow standards and haven't in the summertime for many, many years. But **we have a very important and significant agricultural economy here, and those farmers use that water**. Some are getting it out of the streams and [have] surface water rights, or they have groundwater rights and they're pumping the groundwater for the summer. And **some farmers *don't* have water rights and are taking water illegally, and**

> **the tribes have been fighting that for a long time and trying to get the state to enforce on that**. And so that's always been a bit of a delicate balance too right, politically.
>
> So you got that, and then Ecology came in this past year and **the Governor said we're going to start an adjudication process on the Nooksack River in the basin**, which means quantifying the water rights and really getting the tribes their … actual water rights there—of course, they're going to have first priority. **So that's got the farming community really, really upset**, and everybody's hiring lawyers to represent them when it gets there, and it's a process that Ecology says can probably take 20 years. …
>
> And our County Executive has to deal with this issue and to address the political needs of the farmers, and has proposed an alternative, sort of a settlement process or settlement discussions that would occur in parallel with adjudication, see if we can find an alternative, you know, where the tribes and the farmers can agree. But even that will take lots of technical studies to just figure out the information we need—how much water do we have, how much water do we need, who needs it, when, all of that stuff. So **that's going to take years and no doubt millions of dollars just to facilitate the conversation**. So it can get a little, well, can be tough to be optimistic about it I guess, sometimes.

Lastly, the interviewee emphasized the need to coordinate floodplain management solutions between levels of government—local, state, and federal—and to consider options such as floodplain buyouts, which have historically been off the table or pushed to the side because of the perceived conflict with private property rights and the desire to remain in place.

> And you know what makes it even harder is that it's not a local solution. **There can't be a local solution right, because these are federal regulations**. And the federal government, the state government, and the local governments are all involved in it and intertwined in it. …
>
> I think just on the flooding aspects of this, … Floodplains by Design is a great program that started to change the dialogue or change the narrative about floodplain management, and I think the flood we had here, hopefully, is a harbinger about changing the whole **paradigm shift** and how we talk about floodplain management.
>
> I am not optimistic about regulatory changes. I think it's frankly too late. You know, **the focus has to be on mitigation strategies for *existing* development.** … We could change a lot tomorrow and not allow any new development in the floodplain—I don't think it would have an inch worth of difference. There's so much development *already* out there, *already* vulnerable, and we've seen this in some other communities where there's those repetitive flood losses, and you know FEMA spends billions and billions of dollars rebuilding people's houses in floodplains. And it's like well you know, at some point right, you're banging your head against the wall and you say well, maybe that's not the smartest policy anymore, and so hopefully that time is coming. … **It's time to start looking literally outside that box.** …

> The buyouts are just way underfunded. … You get the best bang for the buck [by] setting levies back and letting the river handle some of that excess capacity—off channel storage, high-flow bypasses. … It's a lot more money, but I think the cost-benefit analysis done in the big picture would indicate that if you look out 50, 100 years, yeah that's the better way to go than to pay people to keep rebuilding their homes in the floodplain. And then **no one ever talks about depopulating the floodplain. That's just not been on the menu, and it's probably time that that gets put on the menu.**

4.3.2 *"Good Government Demands the Intelligent Interest of Every Citizen": Leading the Public as Agents of Change*

The two planners' conversation below highlights their belief that as planners, they are not only piecing together the big picture for themselves, but also leading the public to see the big picture as well, because the city government can't do it alone—climate action takes everybody. The two interviewees build on each other's responses to produce a more comprehensive description of their roles as planners to be leaders in the community and to show citizens what difference they can make as individuals.

The first half of the story reflects one planner's frustration at the public for not being able to see the big picture and the purpose behind regulations, and at the contradictions in the public's demands of City staff. Through conversation with the other planner, however, the first planner brings out their complementary belief that it is an unofficial part of the planner's job to show the public how to think of the bigger picture and to ask each individual to do their part as citizens to better their community for everyone. This story thus illustrates how the planners' conviction that planning must be about the big picture influences the way they approach interactions with the public, and how they try to guide the public to see the City's point of view.

Early in the interview, one of the two planners [Planner A] prefaced that they both have deep ties to their community and that they can't separate the personal and the professional because they care deeply about their surroundings:

> **We've been doing this work for 25 years** or more, and we are fortunate that **we live in a community that we care deeply about.** … Because we've been here for so long, because we're integrated into the community, because we know just about every wetland, creek, and stone and tree in the city, we care deeply about what we're feeling, and so **it's difficult for us to separate the personal versus the professional.** I think it's such a big part of our lives that those things are intertwined in our personal life.

Later, that interviewee looked for a photo they took of the San Diego City Hall in California to tell a story about how citizens are narrowly focused on their own interests and can't see the big picture sometimes. The planner demonstrated this point through a humorous inconsistency in public comments on two projects on a creek bank in the city:

> Last year I went to San Diego, and when I was in San Diego, I took a picture of City Hall. … Above the main entrance in the middle, well, actually, first let me give you my example about obstacles. Here's the obstacle that I just recently dealt with, … and this has to do with the citizens and trying to figure out where the heck exactly are the citizens coming from, because I guess the punchline is, **citizens only want what they want, and they don't have the ability to zoom out and look forward, which is our responsibility**, right. It's not about this little tree or this little garage or parking space. It's about bigger, and then it's moving forward to address climate change.
>
> For example, I have this project on the bank of a creek in our town that we've invested millions of dollars in restoring and daylighting, so that it can fully function as a salmon stream. … A little tiny project [was proposed] on the bank of the creek, and **the neighborhood was certain that the project was going to slough off the bank into the creek and prevent fish from moving upstream**, and that this project was essentially nullifying all of the restoration work that we had been dealing [with], right. Hundreds of comments, literally, to not allow this proposal. Now, the proposal got approved, everything's under construction, it's fine, everything's gonna be fine. Unless it slides off into the creek of course, but I don't think that's going to happen.
>
> The project directly across the street, across an alley actually, so it's not too much further away from the creek than the project that I got a lot of comments on. This project, **the same constituency in the neighborhood was irritated that there's not enough parking provided on the site** to park the four residential units that are being constructed. So guess what the same people said a few months later for a different project? "There needs to be more on-street parking, so you need to require the developer to pave more earth and provide more space for vehicles." News flash, what also kills fish? Carbon emissions right, and all the rest that goes with it.
>
> And so one of the obstacles we have is that **people get so focused on something that they don't have the ability to zoom out** and really think bigger about what they are creating as obstacles for people who are trying to manage a project, permit a project, build a project, whatever the case may be. Here's what it says above the doorway of this building [San

> Diego City Hall]. **"Good government demands the intelligent interest of every citizen."** And when I saw that, I was like holy shit, that is so, that is so true, because people *aren't* intelligent. They get focused around the axle on what we're allowing, what we're permitting, what we're approving, we're not doing anything right, you're ruining the environment, things are going to go to hell, the sky is gonna fall and so on. And so I feel like if there's any obstacles out there other than you know the kind of the boring "no time and resources"—those are true [laughs]. Those are true things—but doggone it, if people don't just get high centered and wrapped around the axle on something that doesn't, that is just such a small piece of the puzzle that we're trying to put together.

After that interviewee [Planner A] finished their story, the other [Planner B] chimed in and connected the point about citizens' tunnel vision to the interviewees' role as planners, which is to show citizens the bigger picture and ask them to think of themselves as part of the whole and to think about how their actions can contribute to the well-being of the whole city. The first interviewee agreed.

> Planner B: That kind of small narrow look is also another obstacle that people think, … what difference can they make. So **as agents of change through our work or personally, we're mindful of that—how we can show people what difference they *can* make.** It's not something necessarily written into our job description or part of it, but it is part of the work we do, and again that's just talking about it more, talking about it and how every individual *can* make a difference, and not letting them think differently [laughs]. So yeah, **having the individual look a little bit beyond themselves and to see how their small action can make a difference**.
>
> Planner A: Yeah that's a good point. … Hey if you're upset with the fact that there's not enough parking for a new project, and you're irritated because the developers has to put a sidewalk where there are no sidewalks anywhere else, … petition your City Council member right, find a way to petition us to get the rule changed or at least for us to look at it differently, for that particular area or something. So I think [I4] is right. The flip side of what I said is you know, **trying to guide people to things that they *can* do to make a change and to help us do our job a little bit more efficiently as well.**
>
> Planner B: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Planner A: I'll read it [the quote] again. It's really cool. I was just so struck by it. I can barely get it out, but "good government demands the intelligent interest of every citizen." [I4], one day when I'm in front of City Council and they're giving me a hard time or the public is screaming at me about something, I'm going to pull this out on my phone. I'm going to read it at a meeting. I'm going to look at those people and say, "*you* need to be intelligent if you're going to come in here and resurrect this" [both laugh].

> Planner B: It's beautiful, because it does say, hey, it takes everybody. You got to be thoughtful about it or intelligent, whatever you want to say, but it does take everybody. … I was just listening to the new Mayor of Seattle talk about the homeless situation, and how **the city's not going to solve this alone—the city government—it's going to take everyone.** Same with climate. It's not like the city government but everybody. **But I think we're the leaders and we have to show people how and give them opportunities.**

Lastly, the second interviewee [Planner B] added that even when terms such as climate change are politicized, planners can invite citizens to think about the *substance* of the issues by pointing to their real-life impacts.

> *Yeah and I think that's relatively easier in more progressive cities, right. I've been hearing from some planners in more rural areas that it's a real hurdle to even say the phrase climate change because it's been so politicized.*
>
> Exactly. But you know what they say about that is—a friend told me this a long time ago—**we don't use the word climate change, but we find something that they care about.** Like Katharine Hayhoe says, yeah most people want their children to be able to go out in the summer and not burn their feet on the sidewalk. Or, most people want to not have to stay indoors from you know that smoke from forest fires, or **you name any kind of thing that people have to gain if they do something, and we don't even have to use the word climate change.**

The second interviewee's reference to Katharine Hayhoe was indicative of their belief in effective science communication. Hayhoe is a climate scientist and has recently been spotlighted for bridging the gap between scientists and the broader public (Hayhoe n.d.). She believes that it is not enough just to produce the scientific research; the research has to be conveyed in a clear and relevant way that highlights the urgency and necessity for climate action. When we were scheduling the interview, the second interviewee said that they were inspired to read their local Climate Action Plan after listening to Hayhoe's talk, and urged both me and the first interviewee to get to know Hayhoe's message because they found it so powerful.

In summary, the two interviewees here stressed the importance of helping the public see the big picture. Asking everyone to try to see the big picture seems like a neutral stance, but it isn't necessarily so. For example, according to Adam Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor, the classic

free-market approach in economics, everyone acting in their own self-interest will produce market conditions that have positive economic outcomes for the whole society, even if each individual does not mean to produce those outcomes (Heath 2016). The planners' conversation here rejects that individualized worldview and instead asks everyone, not just city staff, to actively think of the community as a whole. In other words, the planners were asking the public to look beyond their self-interest, and their role in that request is to guide the public towards that perspective, including using the right messaging that will resonate with their audience, such as not using the phrase "climate change" and instead pointing to concrete adverse impacts that the public can see and touch.

4.3.3 *Getting Ahead of the Curve: Building a Climate Resiliency Plan Without a Statutory Requirement*

This last story highlights the drivers and challenges in developing a Climate Resiliency Plan. Drivers include a supportive City Council and passionate staff that took on this project beyond their statutorily required responsibilities. Challenges include limited time and capacity, pressure from climate advocacy groups, and coordination with the county government.

The key takeaway here is that individual planning staff members play an integral role in pushing forward ambitious projects through the bureaucratic process, which includes coordination with other City departments, the Planning Commission and subcommittees, a volunteer group, advocacy groups, County staff, consultants, and the public. The bureaucratic process certainly includes the paperwork and the actual writing (which could also be contracted out to consultants, along with the implementation of public engagement), but the main challenges highlighted by the interviewees here primarily have to do with *people* and *relationships*.

It is also notable that the process of developing the Climate Resiliency Plan produced long-term co-benefits, including building a model for intensive public engagement, coaching consultants on how to approach messaging in a community with mixed views on science, and being a model for other smaller communities when the state government eventually requires this process of all local communities.

The fact that these two planners chose to take on this project beyond what is required by Washington's state statute means that they believe that their community would benefit from it. That is an expression of their *ethics*—what is right to do as planners of this community—and *values*—this is important enough that they would take time within and beyond regular work hours to push it through.

The story started with the two planners talking about the constraints of the city when starting to develop the Climate Resiliency Plan, highlighting the pressure from advocacy groups to move quickly and boldly when the city didn't have the resources to do so. However, fortunately, the City Council was supportive and willing to provide the necessary funding to write the plan and to do meaningful public outreach.

> Planner X: You have to be really careful that advocacy groups don't sort of get this runaway imagination. … We have to have an open and engaged process, but we also can't commit to things that just aren't feasible from a money and a capacity perspective. **We're extremely under-resourced in this city.**
>
> *Was cost the main constraint for developing the Plan?*
>
> Planner Y: We were given the directive to work with an ad hoc committee, and that committee came up with a—you could call it a—plan, but it was really just like the scribblings of a crazy person is what I would call it. It was totally disjointed, … but Council held on to it, and there are some things that are meaningful in it. And they directed the planning staff and the Planning Commission to move ahead with this plan. … The Planning Commissioner realized we didn't have the capacity to do it. … [Also,] a volunteer group was created that we manage. … It was difficult to manage the volunteer group because they had climate anxiety and they wanted to get it done 10 years ago, you know, so we went to Council and we asked them for 50 grand and they gave it to us. And then, when we told them we wanted to have meaningful public outreach, they gave us more money.

> **This public outreach process we've had is probably the most meaningful public outreach that the City's ever done, and I think it's going to be a model for the future.**

Because of the City Council's financial support, this interviewee said that the main constraint for the Climate Resiliency Plan was time rather than money. In particular, it takes time to coordinate across departments in the city, as well as to collaborate with the county government.

> Planner Y: So when it comes to this plan, I think, **cost hasn't been the issue, it's time.** You know it's our capacity and our time to actually meaningfully complete the things we want to and give enough time for others to meaningfully complete it as well. **Too often in a city government, you know, *I* have a priority, but it's not another division or department's priority**, so we have to make sure we're all on board and we understand and give each other enough time to complete [our respective parts]. It works both ways. You know other plans are happening, and they give us, you know, five days to evaluate something, and so we can't really meaningfully do that. Capacity is the biggest issue in the city for sure.
>
> Planner X: And it's not just *our* capacity to do *our* plan. When that volunteer group really took off, there was quite a push to obligate staff time and resources that we just didn't have. It was like, oh we're going to have a public meeting tomorrow night, but you know, everybody is a union employee, they're off at five, it's not an established public meeting that we have to attend. …
>
> **The most challenging thing was this volunteer group wanted us to advocate with the County to get them on board in a multi-jurisdictional climate approach, and the County just wasn't where we were yet.** … The County's just this big organization and … **it's hard to effect change in the county.** They can't really be nimble like we can in the city. … It was just a lot of things out of our control and trying to kind of make sense of it all. …
>
> We're trying to help but you gotta understand that in the planning department, where this is our side project, we care about it but we're just trying to get everybody in the city at the table, and that is a *really* big ask. … A lot of climate advocates feel like we can't lose a second, … so it puts a lot of strain on us when we're like, we plan the plan! Like we take two years to tee up a Comprehensive Plan periodic update. I mean we got a huge zoning ordinance amended in December, and that was a year and a half to your process as well. **Things don't you know happen overnight.**

The first interviewee [Planner X] said that because of the time constraint and the fact that the plan was not a statutory requirement, the two planners leading the effort had to actively push the process forward in order to complete it.

> *Were you advocating for a certain path, or do you think of yourself as just a provider of information?*
>
> Planner X: **I mean secretly were we advocating for a certain path? Yes** [laughs]. I think we were, and I think we got what we wanted. I mean you're always going to try and be neutral in how you present that information, but we have to take care of our other responsibilities, and our statutorily required long range planning is a priority, as well as development review. There's timelines in what we do and so to voluntarily take up a project that's not required by the Growth Management Act is very ambitious, and so I think that we got exactly what we needed to be successful.

Lastly, the second interviewee [Planner Y] revisited the long-term benefits that resulted from their voluntary project. Besides creating the Climate Resiliency Plan itself, they managed to build a model for meaningful public engagement, to train consultants on effective messaging for a community with mixed opinions on science, and to serve as a guide for other smaller communities in creating their own resiliency plans.

> **Our consultants are not used to dealing with a community like ours and so we've had to coach them on how to approach messaging** and so they're learning a lot too. Because you know, in the next two or three years, there's going to be [state] legislation that requires what we're doing right now. I mean it failed recently, but the Governor is very, very adamant about it and he's putting a lot of money into it. And so it's going to be a requirement through [the Department of] Commerce and [the] Growth Management [Act] soon enough. So I'm really happy that we have gotten ahead of it, and **we'll probably be a model for a lot of smaller communities in the future**. … And we have a very mixed view about science in general I would say [laughs]. … We'll probably be a case study for how to get this done through the public process and it's kind of exciting honestly.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Addressing Barriers to Climate Action

5.1.1 *Preparing for Future Action*

In my interviews, planners mentioned five top drivers and barriers in climate action: money, support from elected officials, appropriate messaging, seeing real-life impacts, and state mandates. In terms of order of application, some interviewees identified the first factor to be state mandates; its presence makes a strong case for action, and its absence significantly weakens the case for action, especially in communities where the political climate trends conservative. In response, some interviewees mentioned using appropriate messaging to garner support from elected officials to pursue an action, such as conducting analyses and drafting regulations. Some planners mentioned avoiding politicized or "loaded" terms [O4] such as "climate change," "global warming," and "Best Available Science" and instead using "community resilience" as the framing and pointing to recent events (such as the November 2021 floods in Western Washington) as support for why a policy or regulatory change is necessary. The fact that interviewees indicated framing as an effective method to increase the likelihood of climate action echoes previous works' findings that at least some barriers to climate action are social, cultural, political, and psychological (Adger et al. 2009), and that these barriers can potentially be overcome by connecting politicized ideas to real-life impacts (Vogel et al. 2020). Although the politicization of climate issues is unfortunate, planners' ability to change the tone of the conversation gives hope that action is possible once the rhetorical barriers are overcome.

Interviewees also mentioned the need for more accurate data at the local level. Looking ahead, this need points to two possibilities for action. One is that local data and models will not

simply manifest over time; they need to be developed. The other is that assuming this need is a legitimate worry about inaccurate information and not an excuse for inaction, the implied conclusion is that when the local level information eventually becomes available, the government will be ready to act on it. Therefore, the time between now and when that information becomes available is not time for idling. The two possibilities for action are to gather local-level information and to prepare for its expected use. In this sense, climate action does not need to be limited to changing floodplain regulations *now* or establishing bans on fossil fuel use *now*. It can and must include the steps that lead up to those future goals. Indeed, isn't that the purpose of planning? As one interviewee [O1] argued, even if local governments don't have enough information to determine what level of projections should be the basis for making changes to the physical infrastructure right now, or even if the public and politicians haven't warmed up to the bigger changes required to deal with climate change, they can "focus on being a more climate-adapted organization" by building up the proper decision making processes that would allow them to implement climate resilient decisions in the future when conditions ripen. As they said, the key is "asking the climate question" and "bringing it into our decision processes. … Climate change is not a one-off issue. This is the new norm, … so if we're not asking that question, then we're not setting ourselves up to be successful" [O1].

This approach of first strengthening the adaptive capacity of the governing institution is echoed by guiding resources such as Boswell, Greve, and Seale's (2019) *Climate Action Planning: A Guide to Creating Low-Carbon, Resilient Communities*. In their eight-step process to plan for climate action, step four is to increase "adaptive capacity." Based on their recommendations (Boswell, Greve, and Seale 2019, 189), my interviewees' responses, and my own reflections on other guidance, actions under this step include the following:

- **Prepare for the right conditions**: have a vision if you can't set regulations yet. Plant the seed, keep bringing it up, and connect with state legislative staff to be on the lookout for potential new legislation.
- **Connect local expertise** between city departments and between city government and climate scientists/advocacy groups in the community, so they know of one another's existence and can build on one another's knowledge. Planners should be familiar with their local Climate Action Plan [I4].
- **Foster technological innovation** and allow flexibility in policy to adopt new technologies when they become feasible.
- **Diversify the economic base**, especially if the primary economic drivers in the community depend on the natural environment. Sequential or coinciding climate disasters such as heat and flooding can destroy agricultural production, for example [I5].
- **Build community trust and social capital**: help different parties to understand one another's perspectives. Communities with higher social capital tend to be more resilient post-disaster and are more likely to trust governing institutions (John Owen, personal communications).
- **Develop local expertise and action capacity** so that in an event needing quick action, the community is not reliant on outside help and need to wait for assistance.

5.1.2 *Funding and Staffing Climate Action*

The lack of funding was the most significant barrier mentioned by my interviewees. Eight out of 13 mentioned it, which aligns with previous findings that about two thirds of planners see "financial resource availability" and "conflict with other budget priorities" as a "substantial

obstacle" (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara, 2014, 76). However, the availability of money is not a fixed condition. Budgets essentially reflect the priorities of those who set them. As the common saying goes, if you want to know what people care about, follow the money. If money is not being allocated to studying the impacts of sea level rise on shoreline properties or of extreme heat on public health in the community, there is no more logical conclusion than that those impacts simply are not the top priorities of those who develop and approve the budgets.

That said, it is true that there can be a catch-22 between needing more information to justify investing in climate impact studies and needing to dedicate resources to acquire data. For example, a county planner [O4] said their department had the opportunity to apply for a grant to study the effects of sea level rise, but it determined that it did not "have the staff resources at the time to deal with" the application process and thus did not end up going through with it. In their words, "in the end, it just wasn't enough for the Board to say yeah go ahead. … Right now, a lot of the priority is housing [and] economic development. … There are certain priorities … that override … some of the need for additional information about climate change."

It is also true that local governments have been tasked with increasingly more responsibilities without a commensurate increase in legal or financial capacity to fulfill those responsibilities. Similar to Salon, Murphy, and Sciara's (2014) findings, my interviewees listed money and staff capacity as two top barriers to action. As a result, the push for climate action sometimes falls on staff who are personally motivated to act beyond regular work time and duties, in collaboration with citizen advocates (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara 2014). Indeed, this was highlighted in the third Story in the Findings chapter, where the two city planners managed a volunteer group to develop a Community Resiliency Plan that was not statutorily required and did so to a high standard because they believed it was important.

5.1.3 *Advocating for Higher-level Action*

It should be stressed that although such voluntary efforts by planners to advance climate action should certainly be celebrated and encouraged in the meantime, they are not appropriate substitutes for mandates or enabling legislation at the state and federal levels. As my interviewees and other works suggest, the lack of higher-level requirements can mean that local governments end up not acting when the political impetus is weak (Salon, Murphy, and Sciara 2014). As the American Planning Association's Climate Change Policy Guide states, federal and state policies are necessary to justify and amplify action at the local and regional levels (Angus et al. 2021). Furthermore, it is not enough to just wait for those policies to materialize; planners are able to "help formulate position statements [and] legislative recommendations" through "interactions with legislators and their staff, with government departmental staff, and with other like-minded organizations" (Angus et al. 2021, 3). Also important is the need for financial devolution in parallel with regulatory devolution from federal and state to local governments. Without both of these powers—financial and regulatory—local capacity for climate action will be limited.

Finally, beyond changes to requirements by governmental institutions, professional associations also have power to influence individual planners. For example, the American Planning Association does not currently require its certified planners to commit to the use of Best Available Science (Bob Freitag, personal communications). If the professional community can set the bar for its members, the practice may spread more readily through the whole planner population.

5.2 Planners' Roles and Underlying Ethics

Section 4.2.2 in the Findings chapter presented interviewees' perceptions of their professional roles as planners, which were connected to their underlying ethical beliefs (section

4.2.3), either explicitly or implicitly. The two most frequently described roles were 1) to educate and inform elected officials and the broader public, and 2) to balance goals and interests to manage conflicts and find common ground.

For a few interviewees, these two roles were framed as an expression of their belief in the importance of connecting real-life impacts to the issue of climate change, so that elected officials and the public recognize the influence of climate change on the community's well-being. In other words, they explicitly used their position as planners to help others understand what climate change means and why climate action is necessary. They acknowledged the fact that although they have limited influence on the final decisions made by elected officials, they can shape the discussions leading to the final decisions by "planting the seeds" [I7] and choosing how to present information and how much to present [I3]. The two planners in the third Story in the Findings chapter exemplified this approach to planning. One explicitly thought of planners as "agents of change" and as "leaders" both at work and in their personal lives, to help others "look beyond themselves" and "see how their small action can make a difference" [I4]. Following this conception, planners are not only technical actors that perform cost-benefit analyses to reach rational conclusions and hit performance measures. Rather, they shape the socio-political climate through their scientifically founded, everyday advocacy.

This leadership view of planners was rare, however. For the most part, interviewees rejected any insinuation that they might be advocating for a certain path or biased toward any particular position. They understood their role mainly as an information-provider that has limited influence over the final decisions made by elected officials and through the public process. It seems that overall, interviewees wanted to maintain an image of objectivity, often in response to the perception that elected officials don't want their opinions [O4] or to the belief that they "did not

get hired to be a crusader" for their "personal beliefs" [O2]. In context of the attacks on planners' legitimacy since the 1950s (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021), however, I wonder if this forced or self-imposed distance from values and subjectivities is still the most effective way to approach relationships with elected officials and the public. Although it is true that planners attain at least part of their legitimacy as professionals from the perception that they are removed from the political squabbles among elected officials, we cannot dismiss the fact that values and ethics underlie the idea of planning itself (Campbell 2012).

Although planners readily accept that there are technical aspects to their work, they are less amenable to the idea that there can be subjectivities embedded in their work. When they need to make decisions, they try to frame it in a way that suggests they arrived at the conclusion in an objective, neutral way. I argue that no argument is ever value-neutral; every decision is based on a set of assumptions, and those assumptions are based on certain values (what is important) and ethics (what is right to do). Especially in the messy world of the social sciences, varying epistemologies lead to different conclusions about what is good, right, and true. These heavily contextual conclusions are then channeled through decision-making processes shaped by varying worldviews and values, which finally come together to produce the ideas that are thrown out into the world via words and gestures, most often without the context of the myriad ethics, morals, values, and assumptions that produced those ideas. It's no wonder that we can't seem to agree on anything! By acknowledging the unspoken and the invisible below the surface, planners may be better able to connect with people who seem to disagree and to find common ground between them and with them.

Of course, planners shouldn't necessarily need to talk about epistemology every time they need to substantiate a recommendation with some piece of scientific finding. That is impractical,

time-consuming, and probably not a good use of their scarce time. However, I believe there is benefit in being explicit about the value-driven goals underlying everyone's decisions, including planners' choices. Being explicit about values can, like scientific data, be a way to get on the same page about why a regulation is necessary, for example.

For instance, say a regulation requires a 50-feet setback from a river. This regulation is not an arbitrary rule. The 50-feet distance is simultaneously based on 1) scientific models that try to predict a safe distance from the waterway in case of flooding, which are based on certain assumptions about possible precipitation levels and water movement, 2) the understanding that property owners in the community would not want their properties to be flooded, 3) planners' obligation to protect the interests of property owners in their community, 4) the risk that debris from a flooded property could travel downstream and harm riverine ecosystems or a downstream human community, and many more. None of these components alone leads to the 50-feet regulation; it takes at least the first three to conclude that this is an appropriate and legitimate rule, given what we know via science, community engagement, planning ethics, and other forms of knowledge. By understanding what each element contributes to the legitimacy of a regulation or policy decision, planners may have an easier time convincing property owners that the 50-feet setback is in fact not an arbitrary rule set by Big Government to infringe on their rights. Even if they are not convinced of the exact setback distance, they may be able to understand or even agree with at least some of those components. **Especially in smaller, more rural, and more conservative communities, speaking from values, ethics, and human needs can be more powerful than speaking from science**, as many interviewees acknowledged.

Planning, as a process to serve the public interest through preparing the groundwork for improving the quality of life for a community, is founded on the belief that things can be improved

from current conditions. Although skeptics have cast doubt on the profession by framing it as a mere facilitator of private development interests or discriminatory urban reform programs by the state, the dominant self-understanding of planning by planners is that planning is an act to shape a better future. One interviewee [I7] highlighted this point by saying that although some members of the public see planners as working for developers, they insist that the opposite is true—planners work for the public, not for developers. If we accept the premise that planners at least *want* to serve the public interest and not the state bureaucracy or private development interests, then it follows that they need to recognize what values and ethical beliefs drive their actions, absent the traditional legitimacy from rational and technocratic evaluation criteria (Campbell 2012). As introduced in the literature review, Campbell (2012) argued that the reluctance of planners to admit the moral and ethical beliefs embedded in planning has allowed capitalist tendencies to drive development patterns. Vigar agreed, writing that "Without recognition of the value of planning expertise, capitalist and managerialist processes have the potential to crowd out consideration of wider consequences" (2012, 374). No more clearly have we seen the severity of these consequences than in the context of the climate crisis, with the fossil fuel industries' strategic misinformation campaigns to protect their profits being the key case in point, aided by the active support or passive allowance from government and political actors, beholden to their vested interests.

Instead of framing "seeing the big picture" as a neutral act, as some interviewees suggested, planners can frame it as a value-driven desire to protect everyone's interests. Some interviewees indicated that when they help people see the bigger picture, they *can* be capable of making decisions that help everyone, not just themselves. I and others believe that is true. In a case study of conflict mediation, John Forester wrote that the facilitator—Lisa—was able to reframe a conflict as a common challenge by **shifting attention "from individual interests to shared needs and**

vulnerabilities. … [I]t was in all stakeholders' interests to have an optimally targeted and administered program, however differently they might each define that" (2006, 451). Everyone wants to improve their quality of life; they just see different ways to get there. This reframing is crucial to move from conflict to collaboration and to prevent unproductive attacks on one another's positions. There is perhaps no better example of a shared vulnerability than the climate crisis, as it is already affecting every person on the planet, just to different levels. If stakeholders with different interests can see climate change as a shared crisis and not as another "issue" competing for funding against their own needs, then they can possibly move forward as a collective to generate ideas for how to improve both climate conditions *and* whatever other quality-of-life issues that they each care about.

Indeed, when I asked interviewees if they experienced tensions between paying attention to climate change versus other priorities such as affordable housing and transportation, a few planners said that they didn't see climate change as being separate from other issues; instead, issues such as growth management and mobility through public transit are precisely how they can tackle the climate crisis. This is exactly the kind of trans-sectoral approach that is necessary to advance climate action. Ideally, climate change becomes just another factor that is automatically included in every decision, much like financial cost. No planner, elected official, or member of the public denies the necessity to consider monetary cost in a decision; we simply accept that it is part of the calculus. Similarly, some local governments are trying to apply the same logic to social equity and climate change; they must be integrated into all considerations, not separated into their own niches. Indeed, in some communities, this integrated approach may be the only way to get political buy-in on measures that contribute to local climate action.

For example, Uittenbroek, Janssen-Jansen, and Runhaar (2013) found that climate adaptation in two Dutch cities is just one consideration that is constantly renegotiated with other policy objectives that may pose either opportunities or barriers to adaptation. This means that planners need to find co-benefits and synergies between adaptation and other goals, because it is unlikely that elected officials will pursue climate adaptation for the sole purpose of adaptation. Shi (2020) adds to the need to find co-benefits, arguing that the U.S. approach to co-benefits is too limited. Instead, she recommended governments in the "Global North" to learn from the "Global South" on the possibilities of cross-sectoral and society-wide benefits. As she writes, projects in developing countries tend to "learn from indigenous knowledge, build the capacity of women-led associations, help communities gain secure land tenure, and design landscapes that support livelihoods, biodiversity, and community development" *through* adaptation and vice versa. Thus, "multi-benefit" projects are not limited to the realms of environmental protection or hazard mitigation. With such an understanding of the possibilities in climate action, planners can prepare stronger cases for the need to mitigate and adapt.

Indeed, some interviewees expressed this understanding in our conversations, seeing the framing of climate action as "community resilience" to be necessary in their political climate. Apart from the political necessity, I argue that the broader framing actually expands the possibilities and encourages creativity about what climate action can mean for the community. Transitioning to clean energy and increasing flood resilience, for example, are not just about climate change. As the principles behind policies and programs such as the Green New Deal demonstrate, responses to climate change are not just about climate change, even though that is critical; they are also about what we can achieve *through* addressing the climate crisis in service of our other obligations as planners, such as building community capacity, encouraging civic

engagement, strengthening social capital to increase resilience in changing times (Shi 2020), and generally improving the quality of life for citizens.

5.3 Planners on the Public Interest

In the literature review, I drew from the AICP Code of Ethics and Dadashpoor and Sheydayi's (2021) work to set the stage for discussing the meaning of the public interest and how planners may interpret it in practice. During our conversations, interviewees largely agreed that they work to benefit "the greater good," "the community good," "the public interest," or some other version of that concept. Most seemed to agree that this concept means a condition where the majority of interests benefit in the long run, echoing the AICP Code's definition of the planner as an actor that focuses on the big picture and the long term. Some interviewees also held the position that in order to achieve this "greater good," planners must sometimes pursue actions that individual members of the public may not agree with because they are focused on their personal and short-term interests. This poses a tricky question that relates to what planners think is right for them to do in their professional capacities: **how do planners know whether the public is ignorant or just expressing a vision of the "community good" that is different from the planner's own vision?**

For example, what if one citizen's view of the ideal world is where the climate crisis sifts out the more resourced and fortunate people from the rest? What if that citizen is perfectly fine with losses and damages to other people's properties and lives? Can planners respond that that's a wrong belief and counter with a better belief? What if a majority of the community holds that worldview, and so do their elected officials? As a public employee beholden to the elected officials and the public that they serve, is the planner entitled to act in opposition to a popular public opinion that they do not personally agree with? According to a few interviewees' *stated* interpretations

about their role as planners (i.e., an information-provider who accepts whatever decision made by the elected officials), they would not be able to reject these arguably problematic beliefs. According to those same interviewees' *implied* interpretations (i.e., having the ability to say no to ideas that "just doesn't feel right," even if it's legally allowed [O3]), however, they as planners are indeed responsible for rejecting those problematic beliefs when they do not serve the public interest. This sense of responsibility was expressed by interviewees regardless of AICP certification, thus indicating that it does not take externally imposed moral guidelines for planners to embrace this duty.

Thus, I urge planners to see that even though they may want to maintain the air of objectivity to protect the perceived legitimacy of their profession, their actions and the stories they tell about their work demonstrate that they actually express strongly held beliefs about what is good and right. As discussed in the literature review, there are many definitions of the public interest (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021), and which definition a person aligns with is deeply connected to their values. For example, a planner who defines the public interest as a singular, knowable truth may believe that they can determine what is best for their community through detached analysis and clearly defined criteria. In comparison, a planner who espouses that members of the community should take the lead in determining their own futures may define the public interest as determined through the participatory, communicative process. Of course, these two beliefs are not mutually exclusive; they can occur in tandem, or the two approaches can be applied sequentially. For instance, one well-known method in the public process is for planning staff to develop specific alternatives after members of the public produce a community vision or concepts that guides subsequent work. However, the fact remains that a planner's personal beliefs about rationality, norms, the community process, and so on certainly influence how they believe

they can most accurately ascertain the true nature of the public interest and thus how they can serve it through their work.

When asked what is right and wrong to do as a planner, some interviewees mentioned their role in facilitating conversations and finding consensus between conflicting interests. Facilitation takes skill; it is not as simple as just aggregating opinions and seeing where agreement falls. As one planner [I6] put it, planning isn't a "popularity contest." Finding common ground amidst conflict involves at least three efforts: 1) ensuring that the most affected parties are involved (or at least represented) in the conversation, 2) coaxing often angry and frustrated parties to participate in good faith, and 3) satisfying as many needs as possible, given that principles such as equity and justice are observed.

To the first effort, four interviewees mentioned some derivative of the concept of equity in their answers to what is right and wrong. For example, one [O2] said, "We need to rethink things with regards to race, ethnicities, social justice. … If we don't, we're being derelict." Although they did not go as far as saying that the "underrepresented," "the most vulnerable," "the poorest," and "the marginalized" [O3, I5, I4] should be directly involved in the conversations that determine their well-being, the planners called for the need to keep such individuals in mind in the planning process. As such, they seemed to suggest that planners should be representatives of those populations' interests if they cannot participate themselves. This idea aligns with the AICP Code's definition of the public interest—it explicitly calls for a "truly inclusive public interest" that highlights "underrepresented communities and marginalized people" ("AICP Code," 2021, Section A.1.a), as well as achieving "more socially just decision-making" and "racial and social equity" ("AICP Code," 2021, Section A.1.e).

To the second effort, some interviewees told stories of managing conflicts between stakeholders, though not always through a direct mediation process. More often, planners served as an intermediary between those stakeholders asynchronously, or they were on the receiving end of anger and frustration as representatives of the local government. In Dadashpoor and Sheydayi's framework, one category of definitions of the public interest defines the concept as determined through "an open, communicative process" (2021, 551). The three definitions that fall under this category are *neutral*, *consensus-based*, and *conflict management-based*. The neutral definition suggests that the public interest is determined through the communicative process without any need for mediation or intervention because everyone can participate fully and speak for themselves. Clearly, this is an impossible condition, which then calls for the intervention of a facilitator who can help stakeholders focus on achieving their goals by finding common ground. According to Habermas' communicative approach, "subjective interests are not fixed and predetermined in the planning debate and can evolve logically through discussion" (Dadashpoor and Sheydayi 2021, 551). This worldview was reflected in many of my interviewees' responses, as they believed that they could help parts of the public understand one another's positions as well as the city government's perspective through continuous and genuine communication. One planner's [I5] account of an upset stakeholder exemplified this mindset:

> This morning, I met with some people just outside the city limits [who were] *very* upset with the city. … They felt that they hadn't been better informed in the past, that the city didn't explain what was happening. I continue to learn that it's impossible really to overcommunicate. … As an introvert, … it's a role that I didn't really see myself being in, but **I do enjoy when I see people coming to understand okay, we're working on this collaboratively, and it's likely that we do have some common goals**. The folks that were very upset with us this morning, we do have common goals with them. I don't think we brought them around this morning [laughs], but maybe we will after a couple more conversations. But definitely even to have them vent and for us to hear what they have to say, it's a step in the right direction, right.

By having a sympathetic actor in the city government who can lend a receptive ear, those who are indignant are more likely to get past initial (or recurring) emotional responses and to see that the only way to move forward and potentially get some of their needs met is to collaborate with the City and other stakeholders involved. The same can be said for those other stakeholders and the city government; no party can move forward alone because the principles of democratic and inclusive decision making stipulate (at least ideally) that all parties must forge the path together. As such, my interviewee's self-identified roles to educate and to find common ground are closely aligned with the communicative approach to defining the public interest, because both roles are predicated on the conviction that people can change their minds. If given the opportunity and proper incentive, self-interested people can become more cognizant of the big picture and try to see an issue from other people's perspectives. This belief was also clearly expressed in the second Story, where the two city planners [I4 and I8] demonstrated their conviction that as planners, they are "leaders" and "agents of change" that guide individuals to "look a little bit beyond themselves." As one of them [I8] quoted twice from the San Diego City Hall engravement, "Good government demands the intelligent interest of every citizen."

Mediation does not always have a happy ending, however. As the conflict management-based approach proposes as a critique to the consensus-based approach, consensus is not always or even ever possible. In many cases, people have different interests that conflict not because they haven't been able to find the right solution that meets all of their needs, but because the values that underlie those interests are fundamentally at odds and irreconcilable. This idea is reflected in the pluralist and post-structuralist views of modern society, where "traditional transcendent sources of value," rationality, and even human reason are challenged. "We no longer believe there is any traditional, shared justification," or "shared rationality" that would indicate to us a common course

of action" whose legitimacy is collectively accepted (Werner Marx in Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 364). In this view, the best that parties can do is to find compromises whereby no one "gets everything they want," as one interviewee [I8] said.

That said, no matter whether planners more closely align with the consensus-based approach or the conflict management-based approach, they as the facilitators must be able to find ways to move a plan or decision forward in a way that benefits the majority of interests. Or else, the impasse continues and nothing gets done. Still, my own inclination is to at least begin from the premise that we need to work together to find a solution that works for as many parties as possible, even if consensus is impossible. Even if our reasoning differs, we can come to the same conclusion. Or, even if our conclusions are different, we can agree on a common path of action for a period of time to achieve a certain concrete goal. As interviewees indicated, when people are asked explicitly to think about the public good and the people with whom they share a community, people are able to consider the big picture and make the appropriate decisions for the good of the whole, even against their own short-term interests.

In addition, it is also possible that by recognizing that there are irreconcilable differences, parties could direct their energy to finding creative ways to satisfy their needs without having to address their fundamental conflicts. According to Coppens (2014), conflicts of interests are analytically distinct from conflicts of values, and resolution approaches may vary for the two. The differentiation lies in the strength of the belief: while interests are negotiable, values are not. Since conflict management hinges on the parties' willingness to make trade-offs, interest conflicts are more likely to be resolved than value conflicts (Coppens 2014, 107). This suggests that by framing disagreements as interest conflicts rather than value conflicts, planners could potentially help parties find common ground.

Often, people start with similar values and goals, but they get translated into different positions and solutions. For example, some perceive a conflict between expanding highway and roadway capacity against increasing the prominence of non-driving transportation modes. Although their proponents seem to represent different interests, the underlying goal is not necessarily to assert the dominance of one transportation mode over another, but to improve mobility. Instead of asking how we reduce traffic congestion, we can ask how we improve mobility. **By teasing out *why* each party believes their solution is "correct" and *how* they got to the solutions they champion, planners can help parties get over their apparent disagreement over solutions and pose a new problem instead.** As Forester described in his case study of Lisa the facilitator, she focused on helping "stakeholders learn about each other's underlying concerns, … to look beyond their initial positions to the less clearly articulated wishes, needs, aspirations, concerns, obligations, and fears that were driving their adamantly proposed solutions" (2006, 452). Simply by framing the question differently, the answers and approaches can vary dramatically, and new avenues for collaboration and common ground can emerge where previously only anger and frustration existed.

That said, sometimes there is truly no common ground, and an attempt to find a compromise can result in conclusions that jeopardize ethical principles (Chan and Protzen 2018). For example, Chan and Protzen described a case in the Netherlands where decision makers had to decide whether to let an upstream community flood in a controlled fashion in order to protect a downstream community from uncontrolled flooding. In this case, the downstream community was Rotterdam, a densely populated city with high economic value. On the other hand, the consequences of controlled flooding upstream included a possible drop in property values in anticipation of floods, as well as actual flood damage. Furthermore, people there found the idea of

controlled, human-caused flooding more morally dubious than uncontrolled, natural flooding. As decision makers deliberated what to do, the residents in the smaller upstream communities "wondered if their lives and goods are worth less than those living in Rotterdam" (Chan and Protzen 2018, 182). In this case, simply posing the question of whether the upstream community should be flooded to protect Rotterdam was a moral insult. The fact that it was even considered as an option seemed to violate principles of justice. The people in the upstream community have just as unalienable rights as do the people of Rotterdam; their lives should not be compromised to protect equally valuable lives. Hence, Chan and Protzen cautioned planners against projects that "subject certain groups to the less desirable end of any distributive asymmetry" (2018, 181), where the compromise in question holds double meaning, both a "compromise" as in settling a dispute (as in conceding to a compromise) and a "compromise" as in jeopardizing the quality of something (as in compromising public safety).

Thus, in order to avoid these harmful compromises, one of planners' functions as a facilitator in the decision process can be to set the ethical boundaries (and perhaps others boundaries such as legal and financial limits, depending on how much the government is willing to respond to changing needs and opportunities) for what is negotiable and compromisable and what is not. This brings us to the final effort of satisfying as many needs as possible without jeopardizing ethics. According to Mugerauer (1996), there are four basic principles in ethics that are agreed upon by theorists regardless of "their particular bent (utilitarians, deontologists, natural law people)" (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 354-5):

1. **Autonomy**: "Persons have the right to make decisions about their own courses of action" and "their own lives." This is a fundamental principle, and "not simply in Western culture." If people aren't seen to be responsible for their own actions, then there is no need to talk

about ethics. We need to respect another's responsible choices even if we disagree with them.

2. **Beneficence**: "One has an obligation to do good" "on behalf of others," "to help other people."
3. **Non-maleficence**: "We shall not do or allow harm to come to others, … not only obvious bodily or physical harm, but also harm to a person's reputation, property, or liberty." For professionals, such as planners, this includes "the responsibility to guard against negligence, indifference, and obliviousness to new ideas or information that might result in harm. Thus, we are responsible for keeping up to date on the latest research findings." This idea has clear connections to the climate crisis, where planners must consider climate change in their role as servants of the public interest.
4. **Justice**: Justice applies between the self and other members of one's society, between societies, and between human societies and other species or the natural environment. "Justice is sometimes defined fairly straightforwardly or intuitively" as what is "fair" or "equitable," or as "that to which reasonable, rational people would agree if they had a choice about how their lives would be governed." "The fundamental principle is that individuals, social sub-groups, and whole societies that have the right to self-determination—because they are autonomous—also are due justice (the right not to be treated unfairly, unless they should freely agree to it)."

On the concept of justice, Mugerauer adds the idea of "distributive justice for the benefits and harms of environmental resources among societies existing today and then between today's societies and societies in the future" (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 359-60). In context of these ideas, we see a clear need for planners to lay the groundwork for climate action in order to

adequately serve the "public interest," both for the present public and the future public. As one pair of interviewees said, "in terms of climate change, … wrong is doing nothing" [I8], and "not to hold people accountable. … We have an obligation to the community. That's the environment community too, … all living things" [I4]. Thus, to act to mitigate climate change and to adapt to its impacts is "right" not just because we think it's morally "good," but also because our survival necessarily depends on it.

According to Philippa Foot, we can harm others in three ways: "*initiating* (setting the harmful sequence going); *sustaining* (keeping the harmful sequence going when it would otherwise have stopped); *enabling* (removing some barrier which would have brought the harmful sequence to a halt) and *forbearing to prevent* (failing to take some action which would have brought the sequence to a halt)" (Foot 1978 in Wedin 2021, 40). If planners don't recognize how their profession has harmed others in all of these ways—for example, building polluting highways through communities of color and allowing profit interests to encourage development in flood-prone areas—and do their best not to further initiate, sustain, enable, and forbear to prevent harm, they would truly be violating the public's trust and their duty to serve the public good. In this sense, failing to prevent harm *is* an act of harm. Despite the communicative turn in planning to focus on the participatory process, expertise still does play a role. As interviewees suggested, the public is often not aware of how different forces interact in the big picture. After all, we all have our quotidian concerns, and few of us have the capacity to look much beyond our personal lives. Hence, it is necessary that we entrust some of this responsibility of looking from above and looking ahead to the professional planners. As a profession, planning continues to rely on "technical knowledge, skills, and virtues" to "achieve standards of excellence" that it sets for its practitioners (Wedin 2012, 35), both explicitly in codes of ethics and implicitly as a "community of

practitioners" (Vigar 2012, 374). Thus, to truly serve the public interest, in accordance with the basic ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, planners must continue to listen genuinely to all stakeholders, especially those lacking institutional and socioeconomic power, to help those stakeholders see the common goals with one another and with the City, and to accrue the technical knowledge and skills necessary to substantiate their claims when they deviate from public opinion, so that they can exercise informed judgment as needed to see the big picture themselves and to show others what they see.

5.4 Equity: A Problem of Boundary and Scale

In the late 2010s and now into the early 2020s, the term "justice" has become closely linked to the idea of "equity." In the context of environmental justice, several types of equity apply: procedural equity, social equity, geographic equity, inter-generational equity, and inter-species equity (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 212; also in Wedin 2021).

As partially quoted earlier, one [O2] of the four interviewees [O2, I5, I4, O3] who mentioned equity and social justice in our conversation said,

> **We need to rethink things with regards to race, ethnicities, social justice.** … It's *incredibly* important, especially when you're talking about housing and where housing should be located. … It's always easy to stick the less desirable projects in neighborhoods [where] you don't have as much pushback and feedback because they're comprised of renters and they're not property owners. **We have to make those considerations now, and if we don't, we're being derelict**. We have to point that out.

It's clear from this excerpt that the interviewee is passionate about being inclusive and aiming for equity in planning. Yet, elsewhere in the interview, they also said, "**I did not get hired to be a crusader for my personal beliefs.** There are other jobs to do that. I could be a reverend. I could be, you know, something else in life, but not as a hired public employee. I have to serve the public, and the public is diverse, and it should be inclusive." They added further, "**I really try to**

disconnect my personal beliefs when I go into my day job. … You might have a short career if you try to advocate what you believe."

5.4.1 *Equity Is Not a Given*

There are two points I want to make about my interviewees' discussion on equity, social justice, and related ideas. First, the excerpts above seem to suggest in sum that this planner believes that their dedication to social justice and inclusive public service is *not* a *personal* belief. They seem to think that it is simply the right thing to do to be inclusive and just in planning. Many planners in this country would probably agree with that belief at this moment in time, but certainly that has not always been the case. One need not look too far in history to find ample examples of officially sanctioned systems of oppression based on racist, classist, colonial, and otherwise unjust worldviews about what is "right" and "in the public's interest." For a long time in the U.S., serving the public interest meant serving a White public, where Whiteness had and still has a flexible definition that depends on the sociopolitical context. Therefore, even though general attitudes and understandings about social inequities have changed over time, they are certainly not universal. Hence, the decision to frame these ideas as guiding principles for the work performed by city staff as official government actors is also not uncontested.

Indeed, one sometimes hears comments like "X is not an equity issue," "everyone should pay the same for X," in response to city policies that attempt to address systemic inequities through tiered pricing or targeted outreach, for example. These are certainly not value-neutral policies, and they are not matter-of-fact decisions that automatically follow from some rational logic. For example, a government could just as easily give one socially constructed group favorable treatment at the detriment of another, or to base the prosperity of one group on the exploitation of another. For centuries, that is exactly what the U.S. government did through colonization and slavery, and

which it continues to do today through mass incarceration and unequal distribution of costs and benefits in most realms of life.

In *The Sum of Us*, Heather McGhee writes that historically, "public" goods in the U.S. were only shared among a White public. When racial integration became legally required, some White communities chose to destroy those public goods rather than share them with people of color. McGhee explains,

> When the people with power in a society see a portion of the populace as inferior and undeserving, their definition of "the public" becomes conditional. It's often unconscious, but their perception of the Other as undeserving is so important to their perception of themselves as deserving that they'll tear apart the web that supports everyone, including them. **Public goods, in other words, are only for the public we perceive to be good.** (McGhee 2022, 44)

I hold a related belief that what is considered "good" for the community depends on who is included in that community. For example, take the uncontroversial opinion that planners need to balance feasibility of implementation against bold climate action. Note, however, that my interviewees and I live in the United States, the largest economic power on this planet and the second largest greenhouse gas emitter. This country has enormous technical potential to reduce its carbon emissions and has demonstrated some leadership in doing so, but it is limited in its impact relative to its potential because it lacks progressive climate *policy* due to political conflicts. Meanwhile, so many countries and cultures are facing existential crises around the world because wealthy and powerful countries like the U.S. are stalling in their climate action. For example, Moñeka De Oro of the Micronesia Climate Change Alliance said, "Pacific Islanders contribute very little to global emissions but we will be living through some of the most destabilizing and destructive impacts of the climate crisis. Whole islands, whole nations and whole peoples are at risk of drowning" (Climate Justice Alliance 2022). Thus, equity can be understood as both an issue

of boundary (where to draw the line between in-group and out-group, who is worthy of equitable treatment) and of scale (how big is our community).

If the community is the global population, the U.S. probably needs to act a lot faster and more aggressively to be aligned with the community good. If the community is the country, the calculus becomes maintaining (or preferably increasing) living standards for the country's population while striving towards climate goals. At each of the lower scales—state, region, county, city, neighborhood, household—the goal is to balance one's own well-being against the desire to contribute to climate goals. Where this balance lies depends on each actor's inclinations. We will find very few willing sacrificial lambs to take on much more than one deems "fair" for oneself.

Mugerauer (1996) used hamburger consumption as an example, writing that many U.S. Americans feel that a grilled hamburger is an integral expression of the American identity (perhaps tongue in cheek, perhaps not). Yet, it depends on "wood and beef from Brazil, which requires the rain forest to be cleared" for logging and cattle ranching (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 363). Put this way, the connection between the two seems clear, but in daily life, this connection is much harder for people to make. The immediate, tangible gratification of a hamburger is perhaps much stronger for many people than the respect for eco-communities in a faraway rainforest. Mugerauer's argument here is that when the shared principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice conflict, we need to make an ethical decision for which takes precedence. By his conception, an action is not ethical "if it causes damage or allows harm to come to the way of life to another mixed community of plants, animals and people," because the two parties would not be sharing "the costs and harms … equally" (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 363). Therefore, in this case, **the principle of justice would override our autonomy and not allow us to destroy" other ecosystems and eco-communities** (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 363).

One could roll their eyes at the hamburger example and declare it as too far-fetched a relationship between cause and effect. Yet, what about a more direct example of emitting large quantities of greenhouse gases to sustain the North American lifestyle that have massively destructive consequences for island nations? Or that of the U.S. using the Marshall Islands for nuclear bomb testing? Have we so far been able to stop and question our decisions when the relationship was direct and undeniable? One could also argue that there are other considerations hanging in the balance, such as the economy, world peace, and other such grand ideas worth sacrificing for. But what and whom have we sacrificed, besides our own conscience?

To be more explicit here, the global community needs the U.S. to take on a lot more responsibility to reduce emissions, but the U.S. doesn't want to—or at least, its top leaders are choosing not to. To ask if that is fair, ethical, or just can only be rhetorical if we don't define the scale at which fairness, ethics, and justice apply. One could argue that many politically marginalized people in the U.S. are also suffering the consequences of climate change, and that they shouldn't be shouldering the burden of the inequitable costs of climate action, such as an unjust energy transition. But comparing citizen to citizen across the globe, another could counter that citizens in the U.S. are much better off than citizens in a country inundated, burning, and choking from decisions made by U.S. policymakers and by extension the U.S. populace. Is it fair for island nations to suffer the deadly consequences of sea level rise caused by big economic powers? Is it fair for struggling and marginalized citizens of those big economic powers to be held responsible for their government's actions? And what is the planner's role in this dilemma? Should they take the side of their local community against the "unfair" demands of the global community? Or should they take a planetary view of what should be done, which would ultimately benefit their local community but perhaps in a less obvious and tangible way that would be harder to convey to

their local community? Seeing as most interviewees said that *elected* officials make the decisions, the idea of the global community good is an even tougher sell, because **elected officials represent local interests, and local interests are mostly interested in the local scale.**

The point here is not to guilt people, or to give them a sense of powerlessness in the face of large systems that make this consumption and destruction possible. The question is, how do we make this case for conscientiousness in a salient *and* productive way? As Mugerauer writes, we need *motives* to move people "from ethical judgment as an intellectual practice to ethical action," not just principles and logic (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 364). In this sense, planning can be a small part of the antidote because it is systemic, and only systemic change can advance the kind of justice we need at the global or even national and city scale. To paraphrase a well-known idea, the most powerful thing an individual can do is to not act individually.

In summary, planners try to look at the bigger picture for their local community, but they are limited either in their interest to see the bigger picture on the scale of the planet, and/or they are limited in their official capacity to care about more than the community that they are hired to serve. On a global scale, most of Western Washington State is not suffering major burdens of climate change, relative to the damage that people in other countries and regions are. One could reason that is why climate change is not a priority for planners and communities in this part of the world, even if they recognize the necessity for climate action *at some point*, balanced against and ideally in tandem with other needs. There are simply more important issues like affordable housing to deal with.

One could also hypothesize that the more embedded a planner is in their local community that they serve, the more likely they are to prioritize the concrete benefits for that community over what is most beneficial for the planet as a whole. Planners are people too. They have emotions and

personal ties to the communities they are a part of, and they want to create the best living conditions for the communities they care about. That is a virtuous desire, both as a person and as a public servant. However, sometimes that desire can run counter to the "public good" when the "public" is a global public. If a planner is not reflective about how serving the global community good can also benefit the local community good, they could end up missing the big picture.

One way in which individual planners can overcome this predicament is to change their definition of "the community." For example, one planner [I4] explicitly included "the world" in their concept of the community, including non-human living things:

> We want to help the people who can't help themselves, you know, the poorest people, the people that are marginalized and all that, … to be considerate of others but knowing that we have to advance … the betterment of the whole community, **the world** really. … We have an obligation to the community; that's the environment community too. … That's what we're working for, you know, battling climate change is our obligation to everyone in our community, **all living things**.

5.4.2 *Equity and Climate Change Are Not Separate*

The second point I want to make is that in cases where equity and inclusive planning were mentioned by interviewees, they were almost always tied to affordable housing [I5, O2] or mentioned in a general sense [O3, I4], such as needing to consider "the most vulnerable" [I5]. These principles were not applied to the context of climate change and environmental degradation. In fact, when interviewees mentioned these ideas, they almost invariably prefaced them or followed up on them with phrases like "that's not climate related" or "this is a climate change conversation but…". Only one planner was close to framing poverty and marginalization as relevant to climate change, and they were an environmental planner. To me, this gap is a considerable liability. For at least these four planners and likely others as well, both climate change and social justice are clearly issues that planners need to be aware of, if not actively address through their work. Yet, there seems to be little to no recognition of their intimate connections.

Drawing from decades of work on environmental justice and climate justice, we can see at least the following relationships between equity, justice, climate change, and environmental costs and benefits (Cash and Belloy 2020, 7):

1. We have a moral obligation to consider the planet and equity.
2. Vulnerable populations are more negatively affected by climate-related impacts.
3. Post-disaster recovery efforts produce uneven benefits. More privileged populations can better take advantage of them.
4. Historically disadvantaged populations are less able to take advantage of transitional opportunities (such as green technology in the energy transition).

Although the first point is a moral position and may be dismissed on the grounds that it is not substantiable other than on the belief that it is the right thing to do, the rest of the list is at least partially demonstrable through statistical evidence. Based on these facts, we can conclude that what is "just," defined as "that to which reasonable, rational people would agree if they had a choice about how their lives would be governed" (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 355), means that we should at least in principle agree that something must be done to correct these inequities.

5.5 Looking Ahead: What Planners Can Do

Although some interviewees and previous works argued that building institutional norms and capacity for eventual policy and regulatory action is important, which I agree with, this preparatory work is not enough alone or forever. The crucial discussions on how our shared or conflicting values translate to action are also just the beginning of what we need to do as a global community and for the U.S. to recognize as its obligation to the planet and its inhabitants. Thinking prepares for acting, but reflection is not a substitute for action. Given that climate change events compound and create cascading impacts and tipping points in key ecosystems that sustain human

life on Earth, we need to act as early as possible (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2022). Once a threshold such as the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius is past, it will be hard if not impossible to return to the planet's previous state, and it will be even more difficult to stop the further progression of ecological degradation around the globe.

As Bulkeley wrote in context of spatial planning (or land use planning) in the United Kingdom, "There is some irony in the argument that one critical challenge within spatial planning is **both the need to develop longer time horizons within which to take into consideration issues of climate protection**, and **the need to act swiftly to put such strategies in place**" (in Campbell 2006, 211). This characterization of the challenge is spot-on for planning. In sum, yes, we need to look long-term, but we need to look long-term *now*, especially because much of planning has to do with infrastructure like roads, buildings, and pipes that can last decades if not a century. Thus, if we want to be climate-resilient in fifty years, the preparation needs to begin right now.

As I've tried to argue in this thesis, planners' role is in seeing the bigger picture and the longer-term consequences of our actions, and how we can improve current practices for a better future. Although visions for that better future certainly will see no consensus, I agree with Lisa in Forester's (2006) case study that "**Whenever there's conflict in the room, it means there's energy to work on something. Conflict is always better than apathy**." We get angry because we're trying to protect what we love and hold dear, such as our values and ethical principles about what is nonnegotiable for us (Mónica Guzmán in Nori 2022). If, in their roles as mediators between conflicting stakeholders, planners can channel this emotional energy into finding common paths forward rather being directed at each other as anger, they would have taken a big step forward as a profession. Again, this imperative builds on Campbell's (2012) and Vigar's (2012) call for planners to reject "the falsity of techno-rational neutrality" and instead re-engage with the idea of

the public interest as “planning’s underlying moral mandate” (Vigar 2012, 362). As Mugerauer wrote, even in increasingly politicized and fragmented social landscapes, we all have “the universal human ability to reason, a capacity that enables us to understand reality and to make some decisions about it. For all the cultural, historical, ethnic, and gender differences among us, we nonetheless share a rationality that enables us to give reasons for our positions and thus arrive at grounded decisions” (Mugerauer and Manzo 2008, 354).

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1 Future Research Directions

Most of the planners I interviewed felt that although they were sometimes frustrated in their work, they were interested in working through the conflicts with patience to find common ground and compromises and were satisfied with moving slowly in a generally positive direction. They accepted the need for gradual, incremental changes and the fact that things may not go the way they personally hope for. This pattern of responses likely emerged because my interviewees were very experienced in terms of both their position in the government hierarchy and the number of years they have spent in the planning field. They have likely risen through the ranks because their beliefs in the common ground, compromise, and incremental change align with the nature of bureaucratic organizations, and the fact that they stayed in the planning field for decades likely suggests a compatibility between their personal and professional inclinations. Thus, one thread of further research could be to interview more junior planners, more racially diverse planners, planners in more progressive cities, or planners with more of a counter-cultural inclination to see if different patterns of responses emerge. For example, Penpecioğlu and Taşan-Kok (2016) found that some young planners in Turkey felt disillusioned and alienated from their work because of the immense value gap between a progressive planning education and a simultaneously authoritarian and neoliberal professional planning environment.

Another thread is to explore how planners' responses to these questions may differ from people in related positions, such as engineers in the public works department, people on emergency response teams, climate change scientists, elected officials, and so on. How do their sense of urgency and sense of agency differ? How do their perceived roles differ? Who thinks they have

the most power to change things? Where should we be trying to exert influence if we want more effective climate action and sooner?

Third, Vigar observed that most discussions on planning roles and ethics "fail to address private sector planning. Given the increasing hybridity of roles and the rise in the proportion of planners working in the private sector in many places, this seems an increasingly major deficit (Vigar 2012, 372). Thus, it would be interesting to explore how private-sector planners' perceptions of their professional responsibilities compare to those of public-sector planners, and whether they face more ethical dilemmas given the profit-driven nature of the private sector, which could conflict with certain definitions of the public interest, climate justice, and so on.

Lastly, I list some follow-up questions that I would ask my interviewees if I had more time and foresight. I was able to ask some of them these questions, though not to everyone and not in as much as depth as I would have liked. My hope is that some readers will find these as intriguing as I do, and that they would go forth to ask them.

- What does climate change mean to you? Are you hopeful about the way things are going?
- Why should we care about climate change?
- What does your community think about climate change?
- What are your most and least favorite parts of being a planner?
- How does the public perceive you specifically or planners/city staff in general? Do they see you as a bureaucrat or part of the community? Is there antagonism between "the public" and "the government"? Do people think you represent "the government" or "the people"? (Inspired by Needleman and Needleman 1974, 86)

- Have you ever felt that the government as an organization is insufficient to carry out the kind of change we need to see in climate action (or on other pressing issues)? Do you believe that the government is an effective actor to act on climate change?
- Have you ever felt that your moral values are not reflected by your employer? If so, how did you deal with that conflict?
- What moral dilemmas have you faced in your role as a planner? How did you try to resolve the dilemma, and were you successful?

6.2 Closing Remarks

In this thesis, I started with the premise that climate change is real, that it has real effects that manifest at the local level, and that something needs to be done about them. The first two clauses are claims of reality, based on physical, observable, measurable evidence supported by scientific ways of knowing. The third clause is my own value-based judgment. It does not automatically follow from the first two clauses; instead, it is my opinion about what is *right* to do based on what we know about reality. Therefore, it is an ethical belief. As planning professionalized in the first half of the 20th century, planners made the effort to establish rational, objective criteria to substantiate their visions for better cities and regions. Since the communicative and pluralist turns in planning, however, in addition to the explicit recognition of the harms imposed on various communities under the umbrella of planning and development, some planners have chosen to or have been forced to distance themselves from the professional, technical expert ideal of the planner. So, where does that leave the profession? If we're supposed to be objective, and objectivity is dead, what legitimizes our professional existence?

Following Geoff Vigar, I propose that we reaffirm both our value-laden, normative principles and our factual, technical basis, as they are not mutually exclusive. On one hand, we

need the analytical expertise to be able to understand complex and interacting objectives and goals. On the other, this bird's eye view does not mean that we are amoral (not immoral) and cannot express beliefs based on notions of right and wrong. As Dadashpoor and Sheydayi wrote, "without norm, we take on the risk of a vicious relativism anywhere" (2021, 549), and it is arguably this amoral perspective that has enabled potentially oppressive forms of power—profit motives and electoral politics fueled by misinformation—in leading us to the unfortunate reality of the climate crisis. Hence, to return to an embrace of planning norms with a renewed, 21st century understanding of equity and justice would be a step forward to addressing the critical issues of our age in tandem.

Of course, that is not to suggest an unrealistically powerful view of planning. Planners are the first ones to say that they are not the final decision makers. However, it is irresponsible and unprofessional in the literal sense to reject any claim of power. To claim powerlessness is to reject the responsibilities that come with power. Planners are supposed to be the big-picture and long-term thinkers. Planners find middle ground between conflicts, or better, find synergies and co-benefits. This manifests in both technical, factual analyses and in mediation between stakeholders. As professionals, they have technical knowledge based on the scientific method (including both natural sciences and social sciences), and they exercise "non-routinized judgment" (Vigar 2012) based on expertise through experience. Their big-picture orientation also gives them the vantage point of seeing who is at the table and who is not, and who has the resources to understand the discussion and who does not. As actors who serve the public interest—"and the public is diverse" [O2]—planners are responsible for bringing more voices to the table or at least representing those missing interests when they themselves cannot make it to the table.

At the same time, being the mediators and educators does not mean that planners are merely on the sidelines. As servants of the public interest, they have moral and ethical guidance that come from both within and without their personal ethics. Their work also fundamentally revolves around uncertainty, which means that they must interpret the vague ethical guidance and determine what being ethical means in practice. Thus, their work is not value neutral. In context of the climate crisis, global environmental ethics and justice come into play as our delayed action in the developed nations continue to wreak havoc not only in our own communities but the most exploited and vulnerable ones around the globe, ones that we had already harmed in the past, directly or indirectly. If planners cannot substantively respond to this call for global climate justice in their official work, as they are beholden to their employing government and thus are limited in their scope of work, they must at least keep these considerations in mind as they define for themselves what the public interest means to them.

At this rate of climate mitigation, the planet will not be able to sustain the ecosystems that are so critical to our species' survival. Although some of my interviewees gently mocked the climate anxiety and "too little too late" stance of climate advocates, I share those advocates' sense of urgency. We truly don't have time to waste. One reason planners give for not acting more quickly is that they don't have the requisite information at the local level, but information will not appear out of thin air; they take money and time and staff to develop. If we want that information to support policy and regulatory changes in the future, we need to act to develop it *now*, through advocating for the relevant studies and reports. According to my interviewees, part of their job is to use appropriate framing and messaging to convey accurate yet digestible information to elected officials and the public, and some implied that it is their responsibility to reject "bad" ideas and approve "good" ones in the public interest. Certainly, both of these duties involves discretion, and

absent a comprehensive prescription for how to make decisions, planners need to use their own judgment. Hence, given that planners have this bit of discretionary freedom, I have chosen to spend these hundred pages on arguing that planners have a professional if not moral duty to seize these opportunities to nudge decision makers in the right direction of climate action. I say "right" direction, because that is truly my belief for what is necessary in our age of climate crisis. But, as they say, a crisis is just an opportunity in disguise. Although planners are just one small part of the population, and they don't have an outsized power to exert influence over the most critical actors such as the U.S. President and Congress, they *are* part of "the system" and they *can* be part of the change if they choose to align themselves with it. In one of my interviews, one planner said that race, ethnicity, and social justice have not always been considered in the history of the profession, and their absence has led to vastly inequitable and unjust consequences. Hence, they continued, "we *have* to make those considerations now, and if we don't, we're being derelict." [O2]. I believe the exact same quote can be applied to climate change. No, planners are not all-powerful in responding to climate change, but we would be derelict if we didn't try our darndest.

In the conversation about delayed action, we must call out not only institutional inertia but also active promotional and misinforming campaigns by fossil fuel industries to inhibit action. From 1986 to 2015, five major oil and gas companies in the U.S. spent an average of $120 million per year on corporate promotional advertising. The peak of this spending occurred between 2008 and 2016, when annual spending averaged $217 million (Brulle, Aronczyk, and Carmichael 2020, 98-9). Most interestingly, Brulle, Aronczyk, and Carmichael's (2020) analysis shows that "the level of promotional effort by major oil companies directly corresponds to levels of congressional action and media coverage related to climate change. In conclusion, the researchers urged climate action proponents to recognize and address how "sophisticated propaganda campaigns" can

"manipulate public and elite perceptions" of those companies in order to obstruct climate action (Brulle, Aronczyk, and Carmichael 2020, 99).

Furthermore, corporate advertising is not only used to heighten brand reputation, but also to directly influence climate change discourse, from circulating climate denial in earlier decades to climate delay in recent years (Lamb et al. 2020). Specifically, these campaigns employ four strategies to delay climate action: 1) redirect responsibility to the individual, 2) push non-transformative solutions such as improving fuel efficiency without transitioning to alternative energy sources, 3) emphasize the downsides of climate action, such as inequitable impacts of an unjust transition, and 4) surrender to the inevitable apocalypse (Lamb et al. 2020). The most frightening part of all this is that these strategies *work* because they accurately pinpoint many legitimate concerns and fears about the energy transition. For example, the appeal to social justice for an equitable transition that considers impacts on low-wage employees in the fossil fuel industry strikes at the heart of many of those workers and their allies. Yet, we would have to be painfully naïve to believe that these companies are spending advertising dollars to protect the workers they have been exposing to pernicious occupational hazards for decades.

In other words, change in political and public opinion about the need and urgency for climate action faces strategic and well-resourced opponents. Thus, to resist this powerful opposition, planners must find their allies to form coalitions. The adage that the most powerful thing an individual can do is not to act as an individual applies to collectives of individuals as well. By linking arms and goals with other actors such as climate justice activists, climate scientists, and climate preparedness specialists, as well as connecting with like-minded individuals beyond titles and roles, individual planners can tap into value-based networks that open new avenues for change

(Jan Whittington, personal communications). When we perceive ourselves to be alone, we limit our own possibilities, and the climate crisis is absolutely a challenge we cannot face alone.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background: Second-year master's student at UW, studying urban planning

Research Question: How are individual planners' values and ethics reflected in their decisions about planning priorities in communities with severe climate risks?

Premise/Assumption: Climate change is a critically important issue for planning, but there are so many other planning objectives that could seem more immediate or politically urgent. That could be housing, transportation, economic development, etc. So given that there are many competing needs, how do individual planners decide what to do, based on their values and priorities? How do they know how to prioritize?

I'm more interested in your personal opinions, values, and priorities as a planner, rather than the city's official plans and actions. If you could speak to how you individually feel about climate change and planners' professional responsibilities in planning for climate change, that would be ideal.

Job Realities

- Can you tell me about your main job duties, briefly?
- What are the main types of decisions you have to make in your job?
- Can you give me an example of a difficult decision you've had to make that concerns climate change?
    - Why was it difficult?
    - What were your considerations in that decision?
    - What was your decision?
    - How did you decide what to do?
    - Looking back, do you think that was the right decision? Would you act differently now?
- Do you think your individual actions matter as a planner?

Climate Change

- What does climate change mean to you?
- What does climate change mean to your work as a planner?
- Do you think your city is doing what's necessary to curb GI5 emissions and climate change? How about your department? You yourself? Do you think your colleagues and other decision-makers in the city agree with your assessment?

Roles and Motivations

- What do you think the role of planning and planners is? Whom or what do you think you serve as a planner? What do you think makes a good planner?
- How do you decide what is right or wrong to do as a planner?
- What are the possible consequences if you make a bad decision?
- What do you see as your role in mitigating climate change?

- Where does your sense of responsibility for the environment and/or climate action come from?
- Do you think the institutional culture (planning department, city government) supports your personal beliefs?

Ending

- Is there anything else you'd like to talk about? What did I miss?
- I will send you a transcript of our conversation, and please let know if it was accurate

APPENDIX B. FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Planning for Climate Change: Follow-up Survey

As a planner, you likely understand my desire to have as much information as possible, but all questions are optional. If you don't wish to answer, you are welcome to indicate that, even if the question is marked as "required."

I personally have trouble ticking identity boxes, so I've made most answers open-ended. Please feel free to be as brief or comprehensive as you'd like. The following questions came out of what participants said were important to them. If there's anything else you think influences your work, please do let me know at the bottom. Thank you so much, again, for all your time and engagement with this study! I really appreciate it.

Please feel free to edit this Word document, or you may fill out the Google Form here: https://forms.gle/1EK2aViQRjQyY44M9

1. Name (all of your responses will be used anonymously):
2. Self-identified gender (I will use gender-neutral pronouns in my paper):
3. Age:
4. Race, ethnicity, and/or heritage:
5. Religious or spiritual belief system:
6. Political affiliation or leaning:
7. Number of years you've been in the planning field (if you don't identify as a planner, please enter 'none'):
8. Number of years you've been working for your current employing institution (the years don't have to be continuous):
9. Number of years you've been living in the community that you currently work for (the years don't have to be continuous):
10. Current official job title:
11. Current self-defined job title, if different from official title:
12. Do you have AICP certification?
    1. Yes
    2. No
    3. Other (please specify):
13. General character of the community you currently work for:
    1. Urban
    2. Suburban
    3. Rural
    4. Other (please specify):
14. Anything else you would like me to know about you? Anything you didn't have a chance to tell me during our conversation? (This could include your philosophical worldview, marital or family status, languages you speak, an influential personal event, something about your community, and so on.)

Lastly, I'm thinking of organizing a share-out of my analysis sometime in June this year, in addition to sending you the completed thesis. I would love to see you there!

15. Which format would you be interested in? (Please check all that applies)
    1. Zoom **webinar** of presentation plus Q&A: participants will be anonymous and will only be able to use the chat and Q&A functions
    2. Zoom **meeting** of presentation plus Q&A: participants will be named and can choose to use the chat and turn on audio and/or video
    3. Recorded presentation sent to you beforehand to watch on your own time, then a live Q&A via Zoom meeting
    4. Other suggestions?

Any other comments, concerns, questions?