"People are NOT well informed, politically responsible, or actively attentive to matters of governance. Thus, democracy must ALWAYS involve political inequality and minority rule with majority acquiescence, apathy and distraction, and an array of interest groups contesting for influence."

Palmyra Township, Pennsylvania is not too different from the other small towns in the state, but many are unable to compare to the peaceful community by the lake. The area is untouched by big industry, housing complexes, and substantial poverty; which may be analogous to a healthy democracy. Tourism is the driving force of the economy. The township is located in the picturesque Pocono Mountains on the shore of Lake Wallenpaupack, the largest man-made lake in Pennsylvania. The lake was first built by Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. in 1926 for hydroelectric power, and it is still used for that purpose today. Lake Wallenpaupack is the most significant recreational water resource in Northeastern Pennsylvania; the lake also produces jobs, sales, and tax revenue that make it the economic backbone of much of Pike County.  

Throughout the years the landscape has begun to change, more houses being built, larger schools going up, more cars on the road, and more boats on the lake. The economy has grown, not much, but it hasn't shifted in what drives it. Much of the same is how the township has been run, and substantial problems and changes have not polluted the workings of local government in any large capacity. There are whispers of change, but severe changes are rarely made. Neighboring communities have been faced with problems that have been able to escape Palmyra Township. The population has grown which has affected the workings of the economy and government, but not nearly as much as other townships in Pike County.

When driving through the area, it is apparent to see the absence of major development and the rural appeal that makes it such a hot spot for tourist. This quality is surely not going to withstand a few more generations, but it is the extent of the changes

---

1 Lake Wallenpaupack Watershed Management District Brochure “Protecting Lake Wallenpaupack”
that is to be predicted. When looking at the future of democracy in Palmyra Township it is necessary to evaluate the standing of, and the future of, the elites, the economy and the environment, and their interdependency. When predicating the future of Palmyra Township two theories of democracy will be used, performance and participatory theories, which will be outlined and then applied to the area.

**THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY**

Democracy in its most basic definition is rule of the people; however this limited definition does not adequately encompass the complexity of a democracy. In order to evaluate how well democracy is working and will continue to work in Palmyra Township theories of democracy will be explained and applied in addressing two parts of the local government the people and those governing, the first being Performance theory. There is an expectation that government elites will rule on behalf of the constituency therefore elites serve a vital role in the performance of a democracy. Joseph A. Schumpeter analyzes the classical definition of democracy, "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will."\(^2\)

This definition relies on the presence of a common good, and citizens acting towards that good. However, most people are driven by their own self interests and not that of the whole.

Schumpeter argues that the people do not have an original motive for their political behavior instead, "the will of the people is the product and not the motive of the people."

political process”. The elites send a signal to the citizens and it is then that the citizens act and influence politics. The implication of this theory is that the economic, social, and political elites are driving democracy and not the people. For the democratic process be strong for Schumpeter there needs to be many competing elites from which the voters may chose from. Democracy is unhealthy when there are few competing elites, especially when only a few have media access. Media access is a vital role in campaigning because many times that is the only way citizens stay informed about the candidates; of course, in order to obtain media access exorbitant amounts of money must be used. Schumpeter attempts to address the issue of self interested voters by revising the classical theory.

In the classical definition there is too much emphasis on the voter, which is highly unreliable. In a broader definition, "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote", shifts the burden to the elected officials from the voters. This definition is not ignoring the importance of the people, it emphasizes the more realistic notion of qualifies elites, whom serve a vital role in the democratic process. The relationship between the success of the economy and quality of government elites highlights the health or ill of a democracy.

Schumpeter outlines four conditions for a successful democracy; government elites should be of high quality, limited extent of political decision-making, command of a well-trained bureaucracy, and finally the control over the political decision-making by the people. This theory attempts to address the changes in the democratic society for which the classical definition is not adequate in addressing. The revision of the classical

---

3 Terchek and Conte, 149
4 Ibid. 149
5 Ibid. 153-154
theory addresses the fact that voters are self-interested and neither in touch with the common good, nor are they focused on the future. If competing government elites are unable to satisfy the immediate needs of the constituency they will not remain or get elected into office.

Participatory theory addresses the importance of the voter in the democratic process. Tercheck and Conte explain in *Theories of Democracy*, "The real benefits of democracy can only be appreciated and sustained by a society that is characterized by relatively high levels of citizen intervention in the tasks of governing."\(^6\) Democracy involves consent of the governed and political participation but there will always be a governing minority over the majority. Benjamin Barber defines two separate forms of democracy in an excerpt for his book *Strong Democracy*. The first being *Unitary Democracy* which calls for "all decisive issues to be settled unanimously through the organic will of a homogeneous or even monolithic community often identified symbolically as a race or nation or people or communal will."\(^7\) This requires the citizen to give up a degree of autonomy in order to contribute to the common good. The degree in which individual freedom and interest is allowed is extremely limited which is why this is the weaker of the two forms Barber presents.

The alternative form is *Strong Democracy*:

"Strong democracy is defined by politics in the participatory mode:

literally, it is self-government by citizens’ rather then representative government in the name of citizen. Active citizens govern themselves directly here, not necessarily at every level and

\(^6\) Ibid. 165
\(^7\) Ibid. 173
in every instance, but frequently enough and in particular when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is being deployed."^{8}

The term citizen does not encompass the masses; a citizen is one who participates which it is then that they become a part of the whole and act as a part of that community. As Barber points out, "participation without community merely rationalizes individualism, giving it the aura of democracy."^{9} However, the willingness of citizens to get involved in decreasing, on a national level it can be seen with larger issues such as reproductive rights, taxes, or war for example, but these are made an issue by other politicians. On a local level since there is a stronger sense of community there may be more participation because of the connectedness a citizen has with the politics. When looking at the future of Palmyra Township in the scope of participatory theory there is going to be challenges due to the increase of part-time residents (who aren't voting but want a voice in the local government).

*Current State of Palmyra Township and Issues for the future*

The peacefulness of the community is not conformation on the stability or health of the democracy, nor the future of the town. Palmyra Township government's main responsibility is to apply and form zoning laws, and land use policies. This is an integral part of the community and much weight is carried on the decisions that are made now by the supervisors which will affect the township in the future. When looking at the community it is easy to see that it is far behind more developed towns and suburban area throughout Pennsylvania. There isn't a Starbucks, McDonald's, or a Wal-Mart, so issues

---

^{8} Ibid. 174
^{9} Ibid 177
that are being dealt with in other areas, such as major development in residential areas, and large scale growth, is not yet hit Palmyra Township. The township officials are trying to balance development without losing the appeal of the rural area.

The township government is comprised of a Board of Supervisors, Planning commission, and a Zoning Hearing Board. The Supervisors are three elected officials, each with a six year term with an alternating member going up for re-election every two years. The Board of Supervisors appoints three members to the Zoning Hearing Board, and around nine members to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission writes the zoning laws that are then to be approved by the Board of Supervisors, and the Zoning Hearing Board up holds the laws set. The township differs from many around the area when it comes to position of the supervisors. The members of Palmyra township board get paid a stipend of $1,800 per year which barely covers travel expenses whereas, neighboring township board members get paid anywhere from $30,000-$60,000, and some include benefits. Needless to say the members of Palmyra Township Board of Supervisors are not there for the money.

Neighboring townships that have paid officials are seeing economic downturns. Illustrative of this is Paupack Township which has a payroll staff, and their Supervisor is paid $30,000 per year with benefits. This township is currently in debt, according to Kenneth Coutts Palmyra Township Supervisor, and has to barrow money from Palmyra Township. Palmyra typically occurs over $200,000 in revenue per year, which mainly is accumulated from fees attached to real estate transfers (20% of the cost of property). With this money the township is able to fund many projects beneficial to the community.

---

10 Kenneth Coutts, interview by author, Paupack Pennsylvania, 12 March 2007
11 Ibid.
In the future the citizens may not be able to enjoy such luxuries such as low taxes and community amenities. Another near by township, Blooming Grove, pays the Township Supervisor $60,000 per year. That community has the highest taxes in the area and is still in debt. According to members of the community they believe the economy is doing well, which if based on the Township income would be true. Taxes have not been raised in around 20 years, which that township supervisor said is because it is not necessary. The citizens of the community are not eager for change, but it is coming.

The appeal of the area is the charming rural atmosphere and as more people desire to travel to the areas within the township there is a growing threat to the environment. This puts an increased amount of pressure on the government officials to maintain the area. In an interview with one of the township supervisors, Kenneth Coutts, he explained that in the interest of the environment, zoning regulations are in place to attempt to protect the area.\textsuperscript{12} Currently, open-space zoning is widely used but is less desirable for the environment. This allows a developer to buy a large parcel of land and can use the entire piece of property for development, as long as houses are a certain distance apart. What affects the community is that open land is lost, and wooded areas are cut down. Kenneth, along with other Board members are pushing for Cluster-zoning, which would allow a builder to put houses closer together and keep more open space for the community to enjoy. This is a great option, increases housing density and keeps some of the rural appeal, but it has yet to be used.

Kenneth, along with the other two board members, has resided in Palmyra Township for their entire lives. These elites have been well equipped to serve in the best interest of the community because of their personal ties with it. Strong name recognition

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. Kenneth Coutts interview
and knowing interest in the community has allowed them to hold their places in office. Kenneth has been on the Board of Supervisors for 13 years, Tom Simmons has held his position for 30 years and Eric Ehrhardt has had his spot for 20 years.

There are few competing for the position of Supervisor and according to Schumpeter this would detrimental to the democracy. However, last election there was a resident who had recently moved to the area and was going to run in the upcoming election in which Kenneth, who was up for reelection, was not going to run again. But, for fear that the new candidate was not going to serve in the best interest of the community the incumbent decided to run for reelection (and won). With growing interest in the development of the area and slowly more people are becoming politically involved that are from outside the area. There has always been interest from developers to start projects in the Lake Wallenpaupack Area, few have been successful. With strict zoning laws, and strict citizens, economic development has been limited.

Pike County, PA is the fastest growing county in Pennsylvania with a 12.7% increase in population in three years.\textsuperscript{13} The growth has occurred largely in lower Pike County near the boarder of New Jersey and New York, says the Palmyra Township Tax Collector Maria Coutts.\textsuperscript{14} Higher population has led to an increase in taxes because of the need for more funding for organizations, larger fire department, more police, paid planning commissioners, etc. Maria believes that although development in Palmyra Township would be a good thing she does not think it will be best for the community if there is a large increase in permanent population. The population of Palmyra Township is only 3,145 as of 2000 and was estimated to be around 3,638 by 2005. Only about half of

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Maria Coutts, interview by author, Paupack Pennsylvania, 8 April 2007.
\end{itemize}}
the residents live in the area full-time and even more work outside of the area, which is how the community is able to keep taxes low and development at a minimum.

The newer residents to the area come to Palmyra Township and surrounding areas to get away from the hustle and bustle of more crowded urban areas. After the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001 there was a flurry of new residents that moved to the quiet area in the Pocono’s. Palmyra Township is close enough to major cities that commuting is possible, and which many residents do. However, for those who have resided in the area for their entire lives and are dependent on the area to make a living are more eager for economic development. The township is becoming more and more of a bed room community.

The Kenneth Coutts believes there needs to be some light industrial and commercial development in order to have more full-time residents and previous residents to come back to the area after leaving for school or various other reasons. Pike County is one of the few areas where there is neither a hospital nor a university or college, Kenneth believes that in building one or both of these is important for the area. This maybe one of the better ways to illustrate the quiet debate going on in this quiet area, on one hand development is welcomed and the other it is only welcomed for residential development to keep it a vacation area. A defense for slowing development is out of concern for the environment, but in reality there is just unwillingness from the community.

**Future**

As the demographics change the elites most likely will also change. If the township adopts policies such as paying officials, problems are likely to follow. In order to get more "qualified" elites, some would argue, there would need to be incentives.
Granted there is a lot of work that goes into the position of the supervisors, and there should be some compensation, but as it stands right now knowing they are acting on behalf of the community is enough. There has not been too much competition in many of the local elections, but what there has been has come recently. If the township is to pay its officials there will become more of an interest in running for office. When that happens it is more likely that financial capabilities are going to become an issue, once candidates have to start campaigning on a larger scale then just talking to family and friends. Palmyra Township has not had to look outside of its citizens for adequate government representation, and the officials do not consider themselves to be elites in any sense of the term but just concerned citizens doing their civic duty.

With a growth in population it is more likely that more people are going to run for office, and more people to contact about those who are running. This presents a transition that may occur from elections being decided on name recognition to financial capabilities of new candidates. Kenneth continues to have faith that voters will continue to vote on the basis of what is best for the area but is possible to see the change. There is an advantage to holding a local office, knowing zoning laws, and how the bureaucracy works, taxes paid on properties, what properties are available, etc. which will lead to outside investors wanting to get into those positions (tax collector, township supervisor).

Elections will become more competitive and locals are going to struggle. The neighboring township has already seen this happen. Blooming Grove Township, located adjacent to Palmyra Township, has seen many changes in their demographics and with that a change in elected officials. Within the township is located Hemlock Farms, a residential community that is made up mostly of new residents to Pennsylvania. The
community is located just miles from the New Jersey boarder and just past that is the New York boarder, which makes it an ideal place for commuters. With the majority of the people in the township located in that community they are able to elect their own officials into township office. According to township Tax Collector Maria Coutts, who also owns her own residential building company, communities such as Hemlock Farms are putting stricter housing codes into place to limit building, for example one community is requiring that any new houses must be at least 2,000 sq. feet. The communities that house new residents are attempting to limit the amount of new homes because they want to keep development to a minimum, and the rural appeal that brought them to the Pocono’s.

The implications of the bedroom community that will exist in ten years, is that there will be even less opportunities for those who want to live and make a living in the township. Commuters don’t rely on the local areas for their source of income or even conveniences. The families that have been established in Paupack for many generations and have helped to form the town to what it is today are not going to be around in another generation or so. A benefit the families have is that many of them own large amounts of land, which may be an incentive to the younger generations to come back. Without economic opportunities, other then tourism, it is difficult to find a career.

As communities attempt to limit the number of houses being built population growth is not being stifled. More people are going to turn to buying existing homes, and developers are attempting to use the limited spaces located on the lake. With more homes being built closer to the lake there is becoming a larger threat to the environment. The undeveloped properties help to keep erosion to a minimum, which is extremely harmful

15 Ibid. Maria Coutts interview
to the lake. When uprooting the trees the ground has less to hold it in place and when snow melts, or with heavy rain, the runoff ends up in the lake. There are a few separate organizations, Pike County Conservation District and Lake Wallenpaupack Watershed Management District, that attempt to monitor the quality of the lake and surrounding areas, but there main efforts come after there has already been a problem created. Preventative measures are basically education and zoning laws set by the township supervisors. The main organization that oversees the condition of the lake is the Lake Wallenpaupack Watershed Management District. The organization tests the water quality and patrols the area for sewage and runoff problems. The map below shows the finding of the recent problem areas around the lake.

(http://www.wallenpaupackwatershed.org/html/Protecting%20Lake%20Wallenpaupack.pdf)
As the map points out there are many problem areas which can be seen along the entire edge of the lake. The one spot on the middle of the northern side of the lake that has no problem areas is state game lands. As more properties are built along the lake there are going to become increasingly more problems. The Watershed Management District is funded mostly by PPL, which owns the lake, and through state and federal grants. PPL does not necessarily need the organization because they can still make electricity through polluted water, but they do attempt to promote environmentalism at least at face value. The Watershed District has had problems with funding and in the future they may not be there to protect the area’s most valuable resource. The organization needs to have public support in order to contribute the way they have been, and although the group has support, whether the community would be willing to contribute enough funding to keep it running is unlikely.

The large corporation, PPL, owns not only the lake but the shore line around the whole lake. The company will drop and raise the levels of the lake a few times a year which is damaging to the shore line, and erodes away the beach areas. Although it is necessary for the plant to continue to produce electricity there needs to be more awareness to the environment. Chances are that this will go unnoticed until it is too late. In ten years from now there is going to be much more development throughout Palmyra Township and the implications are going to be seen, in all aspects of the society, elites, environment, and economy; which is why democracy is going to need to be strong in order to withstand the changes.

Once change has begun it is going to be difficult to harness the effects, because proper action has not been taken. The elites are going to change because there will not be
enough of a voter base to keep the current officials in place. Personal interests are going to motivate candidates to run for office instead of community interest. The people that are currently in office have already held their positions for long periods of time and aren't going to be able to stay in office for another ten years. There are very few younger people that leave the area, get an education and come back, because of the limited opportunities. As of 2000, there was only 549 people out of the total population (3,145) with a bachelors degree or higher.\textsuperscript{16} This is 23.7\% of the population which is not too low, when compared with the national average which is 24.4\%. This number is not going to increase because there are fewer jobs available. By not increasing economic development at a rate in which the community is comfortable with and just allowing it to happen naturally is going to hurt the area.

The Supervisors and those in charge are reluctant to release building permits to large residential development plans. Development is welcomed by the Supervisors but with residential communities there are strict codes. The best chance for the developers at getting around the bureaucracy is to hire the attorney to defend their plans. An attorney that is for hire in the area is also the one who wrote the zoning laws. This would seem to be a conflict of interest but according to members of the local government it has been done. If the previous prediction remains true, that the elites are going to change, then residential development is going to be fast and Most people who come into the area have great expectations at developing the area and "fixing" it up. Currently in order to prevent the flipping of property and eager developers falling short of their promises, 25\% of the property value must be put into ESCROW until the project is complete.\textsuperscript{17} In order to

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{16} U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 census for Palmyra Township. \url{http://factfinder.census.gov}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{17} Maria Coutts, interview by author, Paupack Pennsylvania, 9 April 2007.
influence more business development there are less stringent zoning laws for commercial development, but it has not been as successful as hoped.

In ten years the community is going to be faced with a growing part-time population that will keep the community less industrially developed but also less economically developed. The environment will be protected as long as the residents stay aware at the harm that is created by larger population. The lake is going to need ongoing attention that may not be seen until it is too late. With the rise in populating along the mush desired shoreline there will be a rise in lake pollution which is already a problem. The Lake Wallenpaupack Watershed District is essential to the survival of the lake and funding issues will need to be addressed. In the preceding years it is not foreseen that there will be a hospital or a university built because the land is going to be take up by residential development, and the new residents will not have a need for either. The economic development which is crucial to the area is not going to expand outside the tourism and construction areas. Democracy will be affected by the changes that are going to take place, however possibly not for the worse.

**Future Implications on Democracy**

The change in demographics is going to lead to a change in democracy. Schumpeter states, “in communities not too big for personal contacts, local patriotism may be a very important factor in “making democracy work.” Also, the problems of a town are in many respects akin to the problems of manufacturing concern.”¹⁸ There will be a decline in community in Palmyra Township as more people from outside the area move in. Currently there is a sense of knowing your neighbor and understanding their problems. It takes time to build relationships, and those in Palmyra have been growing

---

¹⁸ Terchek and Conte, 147
for centuries, usually the strongest tie being familial relationship. Self interest is going to rise and in turn government officials will be elected accordingly. Current issues will be addressed by local officials but initiatives will not be taken to form preventative measures for future problems because of the lack of community. One of the more crucial areas that this will be seen in is the environment.

As it has been witnessed the future of our environment is a critical element of any community and cannot go unaddressed. For Palmyra Township those needs will not be addressed because the officials will not have been around the area long enough to understand the importance and amount of work that is needed in its protection. As it is right now, people are less concerned with what can happen more about what is happening. The township now has a large retirement community of long time residents, according to township Historian Donal Coutts, who stays attentive to problems with the environment, and has local groups to focus on the problems. That community is obviously going to dissipate and there will likely be fewer people from the younger generations that take such a concern.

The previous statements also illustrate the problem that will arise when applying Barber’s theory. For Barber *Strong Democracy* is dependent on the citizen, whom is a person that participates. There will like still be participation, because in a small community it is easy to address concerns. But, again the only way to influence decision makers is when there are enough citizens voicing similar concerns. Barber explains, “The citizen is a *we*-thinker, and to think of the *we* is always to transform how interests are perceived and goods defined” (emphasis in original text). The democracy is dependent

---

20 Terchek and Conte 175
on the citizen whom is not a mere passive participant in the political process, but attentive to needs of the others as well as himself. Maria Coutts stated that as more people move to the area, not just visiting on vacation, will obtain voting rights which is not going to help the community. For Aristotle, the self interested can lead to the destruction of democracy but individual concerns are only met if the republic succeeds, which is why he proposes that the citizen will ultimately act in the best interest of the republic. There is some degree of truth in Aristotle’s proposition, but one main concern is that if the people aren’t attentive to the community they will not be able to act in the best interest of it.

The future of Palmyra Township does not look doomed but it definitely will be transformed. Democracy will become weaker as weaker government officials take office and ignorant voters head to the polls. There will still be enough long time residents in the area in ten years that will hopefully great newer residents and help build a community. The sense of community is one of the most important aspects of Palmyra Township and if that is lost then the future is not so bright. Enough people can all relate on a similar level, the love of the area, which hopefully will be enough to keep the area strong and prosperous.

---

21 Maria Coutts, interview by author, Paupack Pennsylvania, 8 April 2007
22 Terchek and Conte, 52
Bibliography


Lake Wallenpaupack Watershed Management District Brochure "Protecting Lake Wallenpaupack". www.lwwmd.com


Maria Coutts, interview by author, Paupack Pennsylvania, 8 April 2007.


(Lake Wallenpaupack Hydroelectric Dam)
Author’s Note:

You may have realized a similar last name attached to the elected officials mentioned in the research. They all belong to the Coutts Family, which was one of the founding groups of Palmyra Township. The family takes great pride in their community and all make efforts to make it a better place. The Township Historian, Donal Coutts, as made much progress in compiling the history of the township, and his latest book is currently at the publishers. Through his work along with many others it is possible that younger generations, like myself, can learn and apply the knowledge he has afforded to us. Donal is my Grandfather and I am extremely proud of what my family has done in the establishment of the community. It worries me that economic development is going to be halted, but it is a realization that I have made. The lack of opportunity is a reality and a destiny for the township, because there isn’t enough action being taken to change the future. With that said, the town will be a great place to have a vacation home, and travel to on the weekends and in the summer.