

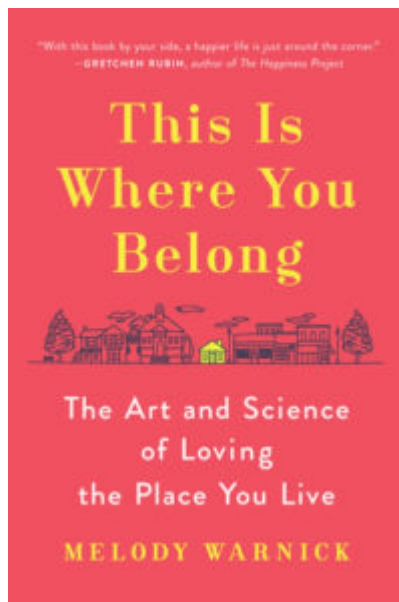


Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: New Book of Interest: This is Where You Belong

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I am just finishing a pre-publication version of a forthcoming book by Melody Warnick

titled "*This is Where You Belong: The Art and Science of Loving the Place You Live*" (available June 21, 2016). Warnick is a fellow-blogger on the Community Engagement Learning Exchange, writing about all things community from the perspective of a "regular" citizen (i.e. not an academic and not a public or nonprofit professional). Warnick is a freelance journalist and has been published in many prominent magazines, but *This is Where You Belong* is her first book. And it is excellent. I will be writing a proper review of the book soon, but for now I'd like to simply recommend the book and point out why folks interested in community and economic development might find this book useful and inspiring.

This is Where You Belong is a fun read. Warnick's prose is somewhat like a travelogue. We see the topic through her eyes and her experience. And while the book draws on her own research as well as the relevant research literature (and includes many endnotes to point readers to primary sources), it never gets bogged down in jargon. To the contrary, the narrative is fun, even breezy. But while it is a quick and entertaining read, it by no means is fluff. Warnick presents some very tangible (and research-based) lessons that should be of interest to individuals wanting to enjoy a greater sense of place or connection to community, but also to those who work in the community and economic development space that understand that "loving the place you live" is a critical asset of resilient communities.

The book is written from the vantage point of the individual or family wanting to know how to love where they live. So the take-aways for the reader are specific actions individuals can take: things like buying local, volunteering, and even learning about local government. But as I read the book, I couldn't help but think about how local governments, schools, community-based nonprofits, and other community-building organizations might use the lessons to inform strategic choices around strengthening community. For example, the first insight Warnick discusses is the value of walking in communities. Her checklist of to-do's at the end of the chapter include many actions that local governments and other community organizations could help facilitate, from simply being a pedestrian-friendly place to organizing walking tours to new (and old) residents.



Another chapter titled “get more political” recounts Warnick’s experience attending a citizens academy offered by the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia, where she lives. Citizens academies are an excellent way to not only inform citizens, but also help them develop relationships with folks in city hall and more generally help them appreciate all that their community has to offer. While more and more cities and counties are offering citizens academies, they still are not as widespread as they could be, or perhaps should be, when one considers the value-add these programs can offer in terms of community building.

Loving where one lives may well be the key to strong communities. When people don’t love where they live, their relationship with their community and community institutions tends to be transactional. No real affinity to one’s community makes it easy to not have any real commitment. On the flip side, people that love where they live feel a sense of ownership, of genuine commitment. They want to “give back” because they loves their community and want to make it a better place for all.

Again, Warnick’s intent is to help her readers feel more happy and content with their community by learning to do the things that will help them feel like their community is “where they belong.” But I really think there is significant value in reading this book from a community perspective, considering how the actions she speaks of could be facilitated or even incentivized, in order to grow the collective sense of affinity for community, and by extension, grow the degree of commitment to, volunteerism in, and support for the community generally, and the key governing institutions specifically.