11.007 Public Policy Disputes
Essay Assignment #4
Due Session 25

Proponents of deliberative, consensus-based processes contend that such approaches can mitigate some of the pathologies of the conventional approaches to resolving public disputes and hence improve the quality of public decisions. Given what you know about the policy process, and drawing on all the material we've covered this semester, write a 5-page essay in which you make an argument that addresses the following question:

> *To what extent is employing deliberative, consensus-based processes to resolve public disputes likely to improve the quality of our public decisions?*

Key to making a successful argument will be your ability to (1) define what you mean by deliberative, consensus-based processes, (2) differentiate these from other approaches to decision making and (3) explain what you think constitutes a high-quality decision. Your argument will be more persuasive if you rebut the best argument(s) against you with logic and, if possible, evidence.

In formulating your argument, you should consider the following questions:

- What are the main sources of disagreement that lead us to have public disputes in the first place? To what extent are consensus-based approaches likely to ameliorate those differences?

- How do public disputes typically get resolved, and where do consensus-based processes fit into the larger scheme of public dispute resolution?

- How does deliberation or consensus building change the dynamics of decision making? How do they change the outcomes of decisions, at least in theory?

- Are consensus-based approaches likely to be more appropriate for some kinds of issues, or some circumstances, than others?

As always, *please pay close attention* to the format and style guidelines on the syllabus! (For instance, please remember that I ask you to use reference-list format, not footnotes. Also, be sure to number pages and staple the final document to ensure that pages don't go missing.)