

PROBLEMS OF PLANNING IN THE METROPOLITAN ENVIRONMENT

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We have been asked to consider the problems of planning in the metropolitan environment. If we were to confine our remarks merely to those problems with which the planner must wrestle, then perhaps our task could be made simpler even though the list would be long. Obviously planners must consider—in varying degrees—the multitude of difficulties facing people who live in the metropolitan government. Merely to enumerate the areas of concern is not to provide the formula by which we hope to effect the solution. It is easy to point out the number one problem we face in planning for the metropolis. It is, simply, PEOPLE. (Or at least, that there are more and more of them).

The most important ingredient in any metropolitan environment is, of course, its people. This is why these areas came to be. And people are the reason we have problems to solve. To provide a better environment in which future generations will live and in which they will freely and fully develop their talents is the goal of all those working to improve society. If we review the important role of urbanized society over the centuries and look at the accomplishments of the people who have been affected by the environment of the metropolis, we see one aspect of our problem.

When we recognize that more and more of the world's population is gathered into urbanized clusters we see another facet of the task before us. With over two-thirds of the population of the United States in cities or in metropolitan areas, the importance of these regions is clearly visible. While there may be concern for the future in any area facing considerable population gains, there are perhaps louder groans in areas with a static or shrinking population. It isn't growing. Something is wrong. People are leaving.

We could reduce our area of discussion by concerning ourselves solely with the physical aspects of urban growth, and in this way produce a list which would include, among other things, such mundane puzzlers as what to do with increasing amounts of garbage, refuse and sewage—the by-products of urbanization. This narrower view of the problem would result from our considering the impact of more people on a metropolitan area strictly from the view point of the

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physical requirements—looking only to numbers, to quantity. What of the current and future population? How many? Where will they live? How many houses or apartments will be built? What of transportation requirements? Do we only consider how many bodies must be moved from this point to another, and by what conveyance? How many acres of land will be used for industrial plants, parks or other purposes? How many square feet of store space will be needed to satisfy the retailing requirements for a given number of people who have certain amounts of money to spend? How many billions of gallons of fresh water will the growing metropolis consume, not just to drink but to feed the industrial needs and to flush the wastes away? Where do we flush the wastes when downstream is rapidly disappearing? Everyone knows of these problems.

Public officials and individuals are aware of them too, but generally in isolation. They are aware of the difficulty causing them the most immediate concern. The planner must consider these as an interrelated package and measure the effect of one action on other problems. And it is here, as the saying goes, that things become sticky for the solution to one problem may create greater difficulties somewhere else. I touched, gingerly, or should I say with my hand to my nose, the problem that has developed because we have disposed of wastes in our streams and lakes. Pollution is a serious problem. We are ruining our water courses and destroying valuable recreational areas. We are polluting the water we drink and also the air we breathe—a couple of fairly important elements necessary in any environment and, which in their pure form, are becoming more difficult to obtain in the metropolitan areas.

But our purpose is not to list the problems planners must consider nor to take sides as to what area of man's social activity is the planner's proper domain. Let us address ourselves to the problem of planning rather than to the problems which planners face. Since planners are people, there can be differences of opinion within the profession as to which problems are paramount. They ask, are social or physical goals of greatest concern? To what extent are they intertwined? To what degree do decisions to change the physical makeup of an area influence man's social environment? How far can we tread in this area? Thus, you have some of the more apparent problems of planning, or of planners, if you wish. But at least the profession is, to paraphrase the song, perhaps a headache but never a bore.

This is not to imply any unhealthy condition in the profession because of differences planners may hold. Rather, I view this as evidence that the profession is dynamic, growing and comes to grips with some knotty problems. I do not mean to imply any differences which are severe and divisive, rather, that different men feel they can do the same job in different ways.

Two architects commissioned to draw plans for a particular building will undoubtedly submit structures which provide the same functions but are of different designs. I like to use this analogy when comparing the methods of different planning agencies. Since we often do not agree, though there is not as much disagreement as some of the detractors of planning would imply, it is not too surprising that others outside the profession, hold varying opinions of what planning is, or should be.

Since, to put it crassly, we stick our noses into so many areas of human activity, it is not unusual that those professionals in these fields may resent our interference. Again and again, from many of these professionals, we hear complaints that we are trying to dictate and control the lives of men. But those involved in the planning profession bring to organizations skills from many related fields and academic backgrounds. As an example, the assistant director of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission is an economist. I was trained and practiced as an architect, in addition to being a planner. Some of those in our organization are lawyers, hydrologists, political scientists. We also have men trained as city managers.

If those trained in particular skills are critical of planning, then it can be expected that some public officials and private citizens, who have less knowledge of our activities, would also look upon the profession with a wary eye. There are many who are critical of planners because—so these critics say—the social consequences of decisions have not fully been considered. Others criticize because they feel planning is not being used to cure, or at least to attempt to cure, the social and economic ills of society. There are some who view planning as a sinister plan and an attempt to suborn the liberty of individuals. The picture is certainly not all negative and opponents are perhaps more vocal than numerous. We have our very vocal supporters, too. Obviously, with the increasing pressure for regional planning agencies, there is a need for the skills of our profession.

When we are asked to render an opinion of the relative merits of a pending decision which has an effect on several governmental units, what we say may displease certain parties. This is not taking sides, but it can be misunderstood to be. When there are certain fundamental planning principles involved, we outline our reasons—giving weight to each point in the controversy. We don't say a decision should or should not be made, but we want to give local officials the background so that they may render more intelligent decisions.

We have done this when asked to comment on the relative merits of alternative routes of a proposed super highway which will cut through an urbanized county. We were also requested to give an opinion relating to the sale of a parcel of park land in a local community for use as a library site. We recommended strongly against the use of the park site because we are firmly opposed to the sale or use of

any public park land for non-park use, particularly in an area where there is a shortage of such land. We drew upon the University of Illinois' library school publications to illustrate the reason for a better site location—better than merely the availability of land. The accessibility to the community was emphasized. The local library people took this quite well.

We act only in an advisory capacity. How well our suggestions are heeded will largely be determined by the faith placed in our ability by public officials and, more important, by the general public. Since we must consider the public interest it would be well for planners to place greater emphasis on communications with the people so that we better understand each other. My faith in the democratic process is unshaken and I believe that when he is fully informed and properly understands the situation, John Q. Citizen will make the correct decisions! We hope to give him guidance. That is our major role. Certainly the public's idea of the profession can be an important factor to be considered by planners.

Whether we be taken as miracle workers for good or for bad, it is still a mistaken idea—one which attributes to the planner a certain omnipotence which he does not possess. Maybe we have oversold our own product and maybe our willingness to tackle just about any sticky problem has led us into a position where "cure all" tags are placed upon us.

Those who would place blind trust in planning as a solution are forgetting that plans must be translated into action before there can be accomplishment. The architect's ideas will never come off the drawing board and take physical shape in the form of a building unless there is a construction program to follow the blue prints.

Any "plan," be it metropolitan, city or village, will never take on life and help transform the community unless there is action on the part of government and on the part of private citizens and agencies. For those who fear planning because they attribute to it an unwarranted role of interference into the private lives of a citizen, I would repeat—actions must be taken by elected officials before anything suggested by planners can be accomplished. There will always be dissenters to any proposals—some very strong—but no planner, and particularly no elected official, is going to espouse something on which the majority of the citizens of an area cannot agree. In both cases the profession is viewed with undeserved awe—for we have no cure-all for society's ills.

We admit striving to achieve a better community. Maybe we would all like to see a perfect community and, although we realize perfection is an ever-fleeting goal, we must strive to accomplish this feat. I am certain that your purpose in being here is to work toward that end. Like tomorrow, perfection never comes. Plans drawn yesterday with the aim of achieving certain goals by some future date will

be outmoded tomorrow—no, perhaps are outmoded today—as new facts are revealed. Since plans once drawn need updating and revision, this appears to make a work program for planners and draws barbs from the not-so-understanding critic. We have seen recently the introduction to the public of the new line of 1966 automobiles. Although the manufacturers of these vehicles had just finished a very good year and expect to sell nine million cars next year, their planners and designers are already setting their sights for the 1967 models.

Planning agencies exist on many levels. Private planning consultants provide advice to small communities and to many very large communities, with a degree of detail and thoroughness which regional planners cannot achieve. They could, but this would require far larger staffs and would be reaching into an area I feel should remain a local prerogative.

Most large cities have planning staffs. Also, they now have the tendency to merge these “planners” with the “doing” departments. Some states, such as Connecticut and New York, have statewide planning authorities, but their functions seem to coordinate the work of the regional level planners within those states. One of the best known planning groups is the New York Regional Plan Association—a nonprofit civic organization supported by business, governments and individuals—which concerns itself with the New York Metropolitan Region. This area covers seventeen counties of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

The Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission is one of two such organizations established by the state legislature. The other is the Southwestern Illinois Planning Commission which covers the three counties near East St. Louis. The Commission which I represent was set up in 1957 to direct the orderly growth of the six counties of Northeastern Illinois, an area which included Chicago. In 1965 there are approximately seven million people in this 3,700 square mile region, and half of these people live outside the city of Chicago. There are 250 municipalities among the over 1,200 units of government with some level of jurisdiction in the region.

Since I mentioned water problems earlier, I might note here that of these 1200 units, 676 governments have something to do with water. Many concerned citizens feel the number of governments must be reduced before more orderly development can take place. They place this requirement first. Our Commission is taken to task because we have not espoused this theory.

The problems facing the growing area (another two and one half million people are expected to be in the area by 1980), will have to be solved—regardless of the number of governments involved. Everything we propose we do within the present framework of existing governmental structures. Seeking to coordinate the efforts of the

many units of governments within the six-county region is one of our biggest problems. If local cooperation can be achieved and these governments can operate efficiently and solve the many problems thrust upon them, then we need not fear that a super government will be imposed on the present system. Again, it is our job as planners to establish rapport with the many leaders of small governmental units and with people, so that they thoroughly understand their problems and the choices they have for the future. Perhaps we planners are our own biggest problem. We must look first to ourselves before we ask others to understand us. Maybe another kind of selling program is in order—or rather, a program of information is in order.

Unless our resources (the skills of planners) are fully utilized, we may not truly know how successful we can or cannot be. The greatest collection of books that the brains of your organization could assemble is not a library until the information contained in those volumes is used by the people. The future generations of our urbanized area will not be able to develop to their greatest potential if the giant millstone of metropolitan problems is not removed. There can be no freedom for the individual to reach the zenith of his perfection if the ills now affecting the metropolis cannot be halted.

The test of planning is yet to come. We, too, must make certain our skills are used to their fullest now, to provide the best possible environment for the future generations who will live in the metropolitan areas.