

Planning and Decision Making in the Detroit Metropolitan Area

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•IT SEEMS to me that the assigned title of my topic might more aptly be changed to "Relating the Planning Function to the Decision Making Process in the Detroit Metropolitan Area." For if we are in fact achieving some success in attaining our goals in our region, it is mainly because we have begun with the realization that decision making is not an automatic and routine function and an outgrowth of planning, but that extraordinary effort must be made to relate the two; for regional planning, unfortunately, in the Detroit metropolitan region, as in other metropolitan areas, is a far cry from regional decision making.

I am reminded of a recent study of the 85 transportation studies which were financed by the Urban Renewal Administration of the former Housing and Home Finance Agency and the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads. The unequivocal conclusion was that the voice of local government was not being clearly heard in the development of regional transportation plans. Yet, who can deny the importance of the role of the local governments in making the ultimate decision to implement, or to not implement, regional transportation plans? Or, to put it more strongly, what good will it do to produce a transportation plan with which the local governments involved cannot agree? As editor-in-chief Vincent Ostrom put it in the December 1965 edition of "Public Administration Review," the test of any plan lies in its ability to sustain affirmative decisions by all of the decision centers which can establish or affect its enforcement. He goes on to state that "a plan which cannot meet the test of legal and political feasibility is little more than a pretense, a proclamation—or an editorial comment."

More recently than the aforementioned inventory of transportation studies, a massive study conducted for the U. S. Senate's Committee on Government Operations (1963) again reflected the same schism between planning and decision making by disclosing that the great majority of the planners themselves felt that they did not possess the government support or the public support required to do an adequate job. Only 20 percent of them expressed the view at that time that metropolitan planning was being accepted.

Victor Fischer, the Assistant Administrator for Metropolitan Development of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, offered his own opinion of this condition during a speech delivered before the 47th Annual Conference of the American Institute of Planners in 1964. In his opinion, not one of the recent transportation studies can result, for example, in a subway system for a community which does not have it today. He went on to say that the transit proposals and action in Toronto, San Francisco, Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles are all a result of community will and political decisions made, in large part, outside the framework of transportation planning.

The thesis that a wide and deep gap exists between regional planning and regional decision making has been reconfirmed within the past year in our own region during the course of a comprehensive study of local governmental organization in the six counties of southeast Michigan. As part of this study, which was initiated and financed

by the Metropolitan Fund, Inc., the regional planning agency in our area was subjected to a thorough and searching analysis. No one familiar with the studies or statements to which I have just referred, the problems of regional planners, or the current limitations of regional planning would be shocked or even mildly startled by the resultant findings. Despite many pages of highly complimentary description of the Detroit Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission's studies and activities over the past 20 years, the report contains repeated conclusions that final decisions on virtually all the really important regional physical problems which arose during that period were made completely apart from the mechanics of regional planning.

Please do not misunderstand me. We have an excellent regional planning agency in the Detroit metropolitan area. The report to which I refer presents numerous instances of truly outstanding professional accomplishment. For example, the Garbage and Refuse Disposal Study, the Recreation Study performed for the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, the Airport Environs Study, and the Rain and Stream Gage Project are products of the Commission's recent endeavors. I serve as a member of the Commission Executive Committee, and I am very proud of our staff and of the things we are doing.

Nor do I deprecate the essential nature of regional planning. President Johnson has repeatedly stressed, in the State of the Union Message, in the Economic Report, in the Message on The Problems and Future of the Central City and Its Suburbs, as well as in other public utterances, that the separate units of a metropolitan area must plan together in the effort to improve urban life. This regional approach is increasingly required as a condition for receiving federal grants; it has been endorsed by the Council of State Governments, and it has been encouraged by much enabling or mandatory legislation below the federal level. And the tide is running strong in the direction of an ever-greater degree of interlocal cooperation to meet our future needs and progress.

It is necessary to be realistic, to accept the obvious. In the words of the governmental organization report in southeast Michigan referred to earlier, "The governments concerned with major regional problems have slugged, slogged, waded, swum, stumbled or staggered through to solutions (or stalemates) largely without reference to regional planning or the Regional Planning Commission." That much is history.

This obvious lack of impact of the fine work of our planners on community decisions is not really difficult to understand in view of our recently acquired insights into the decision-making process. Michigan State University's Institute of Community Development, which is working with the Metropolitan Fund on several of our current projects, has recently compiled a large number of abstracts of articles on community decision making. These have been published under the title "Main Street Politics—Policy Making at the Local Level." A vast amount of research has been conducted since men like Robert K. Merton, C. Wright Mills, Floyd Hunter, Melvin Ulmer and Frank A. Stewart produced the early works in this field. This past decade will be regarded as the "golden age" or the "classic period" of decision-making literature, and I believe that it has produced an understanding of community action which has never existed before.

In community after community, the hows and the ways of a multitude of decisions have been probed, analyzed, and debated until there can no longer be room for doubt. The traditional institutional approach to community action is thoroughly discredited. We do not obtain action by creating an organization—a regional planning agency, for example—and assigning it duties and responsibilities. People produce action; and words and phrases like "incentive," "motivation," "interaction," "behaviorism," "power structure," "grass-roots involvement," "participation of affected parties," "interest group," "the establishment," and "influence" now predominate in our plans.

It is time that we make use of this new knowledge and understanding of decision making, and accept the fact that the planning agency is but one element in the community action process. We can then determine what must be done to increase its importance and impact. This, I am confident, can be accomplished.

In Detroit we are attempting to achieve this goal in a number of ways. First, we are convinced that in a metropolitan region such as ours, one of the most significant obstacles to the implementation of regional plans is the difficulty inherent in having a multitude of independent local jurisdictions act in concert with one another. The

question arises, "To whom do the planners present their recommendations for regional progress?" And the inescapable answer is that there is no one recipient with authority to act on behalf of the entire region, and also the multiple recipients (and they number into the hundreds) have no ready means of joining together to do whatever should be done to translate the recommendations into regional decisions.

Accordingly, we are now well on our way to organizing all of our local governmental decision makers into a formally established agency which can consider and act on regional matters on behalf of the entire region. This organization, which is expected to take the form of a council of governments comprised of our 404 cities, townships, counties and school districts, was recommended by the study on governmental organization to which I referred earlier. When established, it will provide a continuing forum in which all of the public officials of our region may, among other things, discuss those subjects which properly claim the attention of professional planners. It will also provide those planners with a source of direction and advice on the social and economic and political realities of regional development. And, most important, this voluntary association of local decision makers will provide an official agency for the implementation of planning recommendations. Fortunately, we have a sound foundation on which to erect this structure: the Supervisors' Inter-County Committee, an association of county officials of the six counties of southeast Michigan which has provided significant interlocal communication and cooperation during the past 11 years.

Second, we are currently doing everything we can to incorporate the regional planning process into the decision-making hierarchy where we believe it properly belongs. The concept of independent regional planning commissions which seek funds from, but bear no authoritative obligation to, the local jurisdictions whose facilities and land usages they are planning, is obviously a poor one, and it has not succeeded. Local officials who have no significant role in initiating the planning process other than paying for it will not feel bound by its results whether they view these results individually or collectively.

Our proposed means of restoring regional planning to its role as a service to the regional decision makers also stems from the Metropolitan Fund study on governmental organization. This study recommends that the professional and technical staff of our Regional Planning Commission be transferred to the proposed metropolitan council of governments, where it would constitute the official planning arm of all of the local jurisdictions in our region. The citizen members of the existing commission might then become members of an advisory committee on planning which could be of assistance to the council of governments. And regional planning would no longer take place in a vacuum, running the risk of producing sterile "textbook exercises." Like every other element of public administration, it would fit within an ordered and operative structure.

Third, we are doing our best to increase the involvement of the lay citizenry in all matters relevant to regional planning. For the present, this is being done through a variety of methods. We have, for example, an organization known as the Detroit Forum for Metropolitan Area Goals which holds periodic conferences on regional topics. These conferences, which have been partially sponsored and financed by the Metropolitan Fund, have exposed substantial numbers of individuals and civic associations to the regional planning process during the past several years.

In the future, however, we expect to go well beyond this level of citizen involvement. Another recently completed Metropolitan Fund study recommends a region-wide citizen information-education-response program which should reach our regional residents in greatly increased numbers and which should enable their views and attitudes to become a very real part of the regional decision-making process. There is much to be done before this recommendation becomes a reality. But we now have the guidelines and the proposed process and organization for a system which should produce a regional constituency and a regional consensus as needed for satisfactory regional development.

Fourth, we are attempting to give the more influential members of the region the opportunity to evaluate and to endorse regional planning as a means of assuring its pertinence to regional decision making. The so-called power structure studies clearly

demonstrate that prominent lay leaders of our communities are extremely important in the process of reaching regional decisions. Granted, these nongovernmental leaders may be difficult to identify and their influence may vary with the issues. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that if regional plans are to be implemented, the leadership community must be fully involved.

In the Detroit region, we believe that in many instances the Metropolitan Fund provides the mechanism for such leadership involvement and commitment. We have on our Board of Trustees 57 leaders from all sections and all major occupational and professional interests within our region. Business is represented by the presidents and other top officials of Ford Motor Co., General Motors Corp., Chrysler Corp., American Motors Corp., the four major utility companies, the Greater Detroit Board of Commerce, the leading department store chain, four major banks, and several other outstanding commercial enterprises.

Labor is represented by the president and vice president of the United Automobile Workers, the president of the Wayne County AFL-CIO, and the Secretary-Manager of the Detroit and Wayne County Building Trades Council.

Education is represented by the presidents and several of the vice presidents of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, the President and the Chancellor of the University of Detroit, and the Superintendent of the Detroit Board of Education.

Government is represented by the mayor of the largest city in each of our six counties, the chairman of the Board of County Supervisors in each of the counties, the Chairman of the Regional Planning Commission, the Executive Directors of the Supervisors Inter-County Committee, and the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority.

And, finally, the Board includes outstanding regional leaders best identified by their several religious, ethnic, professional, and judicial affiliations.

This is clearly a broad spectrum of regional representation, particularly considering that, except for the 12 mayors and county board chairmen, each of the trustees reflects area-wide interests as well as occupational or functional interests.

Thus, when the Metropolitan Fund presents to its trustees the results of a study on some regional matter and develops an official position on that matter in which its trustees can concur, it is immediately contributing an important degree of support to necessary regional action by the leadership of the region. We feel that such evidence of leadership may be the most important key to bridging the gap between planning and decision making.

I have mentioned four essential prerequisites to relating the planning function effectively to the decision-making responsibility in a metropolitan environment; namely, providing a governmental forum for regional review and action by local governmental units, incorporating the planning agency in that governmental structure and hierarchy, informing and involving the citizenry in regional matters, and garnering the support of the important leadership elements within the region.

There is certainly much more that might be said on this subject. I would not want to omit the value of outstanding political leaders whose vision goes beyond the confines of their own jurisdictions and whose statesmanship recognizes the interdependence as well as the moral obligation of our local communities to one another.

Nor would I want to ignore the value of adherence to several highly significant and modern trends in planning. Jerome L. Kaufman, Director of Special Studies for the American Society of Planning Officials, has enumerated these very capably in a recent article, and I am particularly pleased with his prediction that planning programs of the future will become broader in coverage, more reliant on facts for substantiation, more flexible in implementation, and that they have, in short, entered a new era of maturity and sophistication.

And, finally, I would not want to overlook the need for a great deal of thought, research, and experimentation concerning the fiscal aspects of metropolitan planning. To date, no adequate philosophy of financing regional needs has been developed. Decision makers, presented with a technically acceptable proposal for a regional facility, are faced with the question of who is to pay for it and how. More than political or legal considerations, inability to reconcile costs with benefits, lack of grant-in-aid

subsidy formulas based on precise needs and resources, failure to determine the nature, extent, and dollar value of the benefits to the community affected, and the question of the proportionate shares to be borne by federal, state and local governments in paying for regionally required services, doom many reports and recommendations on regional development to the proverbial shelf.

The 1966 State Legislative Program of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations points out that the financing of services needed only in a portion of a county has often resulted in the creation of special districts to the detriment of orderly local government. The Commission suggests a way to minimize the need for special districts by authorizing counties to create subordinate taxing areas and to permit the county governing body to set tax rates within such areas at a different level than the overall tax rate.

There have been a few notable examples of regional financing, one of the best known of which is the Toronto Debenture Plan, which has resulted in broadly expanded credit and lower interest rates for all of the jurisdictions within the metropolitan area, including Toronto itself. Another is the four-county Denver metropolitan area capital improvements district, in which the voters of the region approved a tax to finance a variety of physical improvements. Here, the plan has run afoul of the Colorado constitution, but the principle of regional financing of regional facilities has nevertheless been established.

These proposals and experiments and others like them are certainly worthy of careful scrutiny. At the Metropolitan Fund, we are already in the process of seeing to it that they, as well as several other possible means of overcoming the fiscal obstacles to implementing regional plans, are thoroughly analyzed, and that conclusions tailored to our own regional requirements and goals are developed.

Planning and decision making in a metropolitan area can become two smoothly integrated steps in a single process. But this is not accomplished in the absence of several very explicit actions, nor can it be realized overnight. Many of our metropolitan areas are working toward that end. Hopefully, the title "Planning and Decision Making in the Detroit Metropolitan Area" will be fully appropriate for a presentation in the not-too-distant future.