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*An earlier draft of this article was written by the author in his capacity as chair of the Urban Planning Policy Committee, established by the Urban Division of the National Association of Land Grant Colleges and State Universities. This article is one of a series of policy papers commissioned to develop urban policy alternatives and to make recommendations as to the urban universities' contribution to renewing the national urban policy debate. The other members of the committee who collectively and separately contributed to, critiqued, and reviewed earlier drafts were John DeGrove (Florida Atlantic University), Bernard Frieden and Lynn Sagalyn (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Marshall Kaplan (University of Colorado at Denver), Charles Orlebeke (University of Illinois at Chicago), and Hans Spiegel (Hunter College, CUNY). Given their participation and collaboration in fashioning a common analysis, they can be considered co-authors, but Wood is solely responsible for this last version and whatever errors in fact or judgment it may contain.*

# Who Will Be the Regional Planners for the 1990s?

## *The Challenge for the Urban University*

### **The Bare Bones Issue**

For half a century now insistent, persistent calls by urban scholars and reformers for comprehensive public planning to help shape America's urban regions have fallen on deaf ears. Nowhere has political resistance to professional efforts to subdue the freewheeling impulses of the most ardent disciples of the marketplace—and developers—been stronger than in metropolitan planning. But now, as the Reagan years come under increasing public and political scrutiny, the call for "Morning in America" fades. The savings and loan debacles as well as "Edge City" catastrophies of empty shopping malls and vacant condominiums signal loud and clear that the countervailing power of government is necessary to civilize the marketplace. If the time has arrived for that public intervention, government needs to be informed. That is where urban universities with a metropolitan perspective can play a powerful and purposeful role.

What has happened to change the prospects for regional reform and the renaissance of genuinely influential metropolitan-wide planning bodies? What reasons are there to suppose that the stubborn spirit of grassroots parochialism can be subdued and the

fragmented pattern of public authority now scattered among some two hundred local governments in each of our 318 metropolitan areas can be restructured into more comprehensive units? What is so different about the 1990s that we now send the scholars and reformers once more into the breach?

The short answers to these questions are three. First, the conditions of waste, duplication, inequitable subsidies, conflicting regulations, and persistent central city ghettos contrasted with gold-plated suburbs, which prompted the first reform, have intensified. They resurface now along with a host of social issues not so clearly recognized a generation ago: drugs, crime, homelessness, and the absence of affordable housing. Second, added to the issues of human inequities, irrational land uses, and waste in the duplication of community services and facilities is now the conscious, articulated, and powerfully popular concern with the environment. The 1970s and the 1980s placed clean air, clean water, clean land on the national agenda, and it is there now with a vengeance in metropolitan areas. Third, the nation now knows the limits of its economic growth—in the public and the private sectors alike. We have discovered that we cannot afford everything we want; we cannot spend our way out of every crisis; we cannot rely on the market's invisible hand to build coherent communities. In short, we cannot tolerate the costs of the aimlessly and ceaselessly growing spread cities. So these are powerful reasons for looking again at the necessity and desirability of comprehensive metropolitan planning.

### Where We Have Been

Thirty years ago the New York Metropolitan Region Study, under the able direction of economist Raymond Vernon, published the ninth and last volume in a series that represented the most comprehensive inquiry yet undertaken into the workings of an American metropolitan area. The first eight volumes had dissected the workings of the metropolitan marketplace, which in those years constituted one-tenth of the nation's economy. The last, *1400 Governments*, undertook to forecast the region's governmental pattern in 1985.

Basically, both the economic and political predictions of the study indicated that things would stay much as they were. Economically, New York would remain the corporate headquarters of the world, its financial and communication service center, while manufacturing slipped away. Politically, while reformers would continue to agitate for metropolitan-wide government, the forecast was that the New York region would muddle through with much the same fragmented, overlapping layers of local jurisdiction that then existed. *1400 Governments* concluded that "few inhabitants of the region, or of the nation for that matter, have ever looked to their local governments to 'optimize' or 'maximize' anything....if conditions of blight and obsolescence become too severe for our tastes, many of us simply move out further in the suburbs...in the great American pioneering tradition of abandoning settlements we have despoiled."

To be sure, in 1982 Michael Danielson and James Doig revisited the region and understandably found the earlier thesis of *1400 Governments* simplistic. These authors assigned governmental policy a role in regional development that, while secondary, was nonetheless important. They demonstrated that what the giant authorities and the little local jurisdictions did or did not do in public investment and land-use controls skewed the impact of the marketplace. But it skewed in the direction of the spreading metropolis.

Although a generation apart, both studies of the nation's largest metropolitan areas recorded a common conclusion: residential densities continued to fall; mass transportation investments proved no match for the automobile; a steady dispersion of jobs and shopping centers continued. Spread city became a reality. The migration that began in the 1950s rolled on substantially unabated.

Briefly, in the 1960s, the federal government intervened. Urban renewal funds, begun in the Eisenhower administration, grew substantially. The express lanes of the interstate highway program penetrated the city—cutting a wide swath through usually poor neighborhoods. The cities demanded and received a “place at the Cabinet Table” with the establishment of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 1966 and 1968 Housing and Urban Development Acts made commitments to inner-city neighborhoods and new towns outside metropolitan areas. These laws also explicitly acknowledged the need for metropolitan planning and increased collaboration among local governments in metropolitan areas—and provided modest funds for these undertakings. In addition, the HUD Acts also acknowledged that university research and talent ought to be more directly at the disposal of local officials. So the Urban Observatory Program was launched, pairing urban universities and colleges with city halls across the country to improve service delivery, restore neighborhoods, and, indeed, empower them.

These initiatives in housing, in redevelopment, in planning, and in intergovernmental collaboration continued until the mid-1970s. Indeed, they were popular enough to grow in size until they resulted, in the view of some, in an “overload” of the federal system. Whether or not this diagnosis was in fact accurate is now largely irrelevant. By 1975 the aftereffects of Vietnam, stagflation, and a series of oil shocks slowed the momentum of federal aid. Throughout the 1980s, the growing deficit and the Reagan administration's antipathy to public action at almost any level further squeezed appropriations for city and suburb alike. For issues such as the homeless, affordable housing, and public education, no national relief was in sight. Direct housing subsidies suffered the most substantial cuts, although the use of demand-side vouchers and certificates provided partial compensation. So far as regional planning was concerned, the “Real City” emphasis that George Romney, Nixon's first HUD Secretary, gave to metropolitan-wide activities ceased.

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## Where We Are Now

If the thirty-year-old Vernon prognosis that the market will be the major force in shaping the physical and social form of urban America has been valid to date, should we suppose the 1990s will offer anything different? Increasingly the brief flurry of activity in the 1960s—the Councils of Government, advocacy planning, and urban public investment—seem like a blip on the computer screen. Moreover, the rise of environmental policy concerns throughout the 1970s and the growing sophistication of local governments in zoning and land use controls appear to thwart comprehensive development even more. The entrepreneurial city and the urban villages that appeared in the 1980s did not fundamentally alter the contours of the spread city or, except for pockets of gentrification, the neighborhood deterioration in the core. Why, then, should the next ten years be any different?

Three pressures for change were already mentioned at the beginning of this article: growing awareness of current inadequacies and inequities, concern with the environment, and realization of the limits of economic growth. In addition, several specific forces are coming to play to enhance the role of governments in metropolitan areas. Each will enhance the prospects for strategic planning and common policies. They are:

- the *change in demography*, which is producing a different pattern of settlement and lifestyle;
- a *rapidly intensifying long-term pattern of public fiscal scarcity* at all levels of government, accompanied with an anti-governmental popular fervor that forces across-the-board program review;
- a *new sophistication in planning and governing strategies*, made evident by the new emphasis on environmental concerns, that links local and state governments together far more powerfully than before without formally disturbing jurisdictions or program portfolios.

Elaborating on each:

The new *demography*, already suggested by preliminary findings of the 1990 census—the well-known aging of the baby-boom population and the smaller baby-bust cohort—may lessen the demand for housing initially. Ultimately it yields a far more diverse population that both market forces and public planning must take into account. This diversity—in marital status, age, family size—will increase pressures for more smaller-family housing, apartments, and alternative-care facilities, as well as for reduced travel between housing and jobs. In this projection, the re-creation of Levittown, with the continuation of the stereotypical suburban profile of single wage earner with children and wife at home, seems increasingly fiction. Zoning schemes and public-infrastructure decisions geared solely to large-scale single family developments are ignoring an important future reality.

Coupled with more diverse demography is *fiscal stringency*, which has three parts. First, the collapse of the savings and loan banking system and the severe difficulties of the commercial one means, at a minimum, sharply reduced liquidity so far as housing and commercial construction is concerned. The bailout now required to amend the errors of overbuilding

in up-scale commercial and residential markets in the 1980s almost guarantees that America's mood will shift abruptly from "feeling good about itself" and "it's morning again" to a massive hangover in the 1990s. We can expect much less from real estate development because in a slower, cost-conscious economy there is less ability to shift public-mandated costs to business, new home buyers, and renters.

Second, it is not only the private sector that risks bankruptcy by being over-committed to metropolitan development activities for nearly a decade. The fiscal crisis is real and dangerous in the public sector as well. Especially in New England but also in the Far West, states that boasted of economic miracles in the 1980s now face plunging credit ratings.

Finally, the prospects for additional public monies seem bleak. Taxpayer revolts extend across the country. Efforts to respond reasonably to public needs as well as private wants provoke public firestorms in New Jersey. Mandates to cap public spending and skepticism about the competency and worth of government are everywhere. Shortfalls of revenue are epidemic, and today's depressed conditions are more than a cyclical downturn. "Downsizing" is the order of the day—and likely to carry over until tomorrow.

If the demography of demand signals a decade of slow growth, and the economic prospects for private and public investment are discouragingly poor, why should we posit a new dawn for public-planning activities? *The answer is simply that our new circumstances are depressing enough to force us to review our strategies for urban living.* Not only have we learned a good deal about theory and practice of metropolitan planning in the last generation and a half, we are now in a position to apply these lessons to a new strategy. More important, environmental concerns have mandated regional perspectives to control pollution, make waste management more effective, and anticipate the consequences of development. Thirty years ago we did not think of environmental impacts, let alone design and execute realistic environmental impact statements. These approaches respect no county or local boundaries, and they encourage the emergence of new regional coalitions, setting regional goals, introducing common policies. Significantly, the "confrontation index" among jurisdictions is down. The nation's big-city mayors are fashioning a new urban agenda—free of traditional suburb bashing—and focusing on regional action as a major policy theme.

## What We Do Next

Given demographic and fiscal downsizing, coupled with new dimensions in planning, what does the urban planning agenda look like?

First, a direct assault on suburban growth regulation is in order. NIMBY (not in my backyard), however appealing to the tradition of localization, is a prescription for absolute disaster in times of recession. Defensive growth management techniques—farmland preserves, super-zoning, utility moratoria, arbitrary service boundaries, and drawn-out environmental impact reviews—have brought affordable housing for moderate-income families to a halt in region after region. Further, local

governments have been exacting high payments from developers for the cost of infrastructure, which is passed on to home buyers. These policies were tolerable when both the population and the economy boomed. They are not sustainable now.

Here suburbs need to take a lesson from central city planners. One of the great successes in urban policy over the last twenty years has been the rebuilding of downtown in most large American cities. A major key to this

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turn-around has been a sea change in the city government role from regulator to co-developer. In contrast to the arm's-length relationships of earlier urban renewal programs, city agencies now negotiate with developers at the outset and continue as co-investors in determining the design and makeup of projects. Rather than controlling

land use through regulations, they are now real partners in channeling market forces to meet public purposes.

Suburbs can follow suit in adopting downtown strategies. New York City's Public Development Corporation and Los Angeles County's Asset Management Programs are examples of government agencies using land and air rights already in the public domain to promote private development. Suburban governments and regional authorities need now to substitute a positive entrepreneurial strategy for the defensive, protective ones that governed them in the past. In a period of slower demand, there is no substitute for public funds to achieve public purposes.

Adopting a positive, interventionist approach in urban planning does not mean trying to initiate a single, comprehensive, top-down planning approach for metropolitan regions. One of the great planning lessons learned since the 1960s is the limitation of so-called functional planning by specific areas such as transportation, open spaces, and zoning. A second lesson is that planning must go on at every level of government, from the neighborhood to city hall to the state. Put in professional terms, successful contemporary planning must be interrelated, comprehensive, and interactive. Put more simply, the plans of any level of government carried out in isolation are, as Hans Spiegel of Hunter College has observed, "nothing more than one-handed clapping."

Thus, regional planning for the 1990s is a many-faceted undertaking, no longer stereotyped as an elitist centralized activity. It is both bottom-up and top-down simultaneously. Specifically, there needs to be explicit organizational structures for neighborhood planning with legitimate public authority. The public and private agencies that deal with neighborhood planning must have professional capacities and be built from a generation of experience. They must be linked to regional, county, and state counterparts, and they must be supported by federal and state action wherever possible. In addition, as suggested by Robert Kraushaar in the spring 1992 issue of *Metropolitan Universities*, there is an inescapable and not particularly expensive national need for a regional information clearinghouse that can assemble, distribute, and compare data relevant to all planning agencies.

Adopting a positive strategy for the management of both urban growth and decline, and acknowledging the interrelation of planning agencies from the neighborhood through city and town halls and county courthouses, suggests that we are entering a process of *governance* far more subtle and sophisticated than the inflexible structures proposed in the 1950s. Rather than debating the best formal structure of metropolitan government—city/county consolidation, federation, annexation—the need now is to focus on the way metropolitan decisions are made: how land use is allocated, development authorized, and infrastructure provided within a single metropolitan area.

It is the concept of *governance*—common strategies among different localities—not *government* that promises to enlist the cooperative forces of both the public and private sectors and that takes into account the empowerment of neighborhoods and communities that has gone on since the 1960s. The continuing voluntary engagement of the energies and loyalties of people in manageable numbers, the reinvigoration of neighborhoods, and the devolution of authority are healthy developments. Contrarily, to continue parochial perspectives, to fail to appreciate regional identity, and to tolerate fractionalization of decision making guarantee disastrous results. What we need now is the development of mechanisms that research, report, and sponsor dialog in and debate on issues of regional importance. We have prototypes of these instruments scattered across the country. We need to universalize them.

It is critical that the constituent sectors of government—public, private, not-for-profit, neighborhood, “boom” community and “bust” community, suburban and central-city alike—be brought together and made reflective in dialog of the entire region. What we have learned in recent years of wrestling to reconcile environmental and housing counterpressures is that informal consultations and dispute-management techniques carried on quietly and purposefully actually work. Negotiation and mediation can be more effective and less threatening than formal reforms. Reasonable decisions rather than comprehensive formal structures are required by the present urban environment.

### Who Does What?

The central argument so far is a simple one. Not only are American urban regions in hard times, but the severity of their demographic and economic conditions, public and private, is likely to provide a new and powerful impetus for regional planning. Constituents committed to finding housing join with those undertaking to provide jobs. Those aiming at revitalizing neighborhoods find union with those seeking a dramatic upgrading in the physical environment. Conditions of scarcity are inhospitable to protracted conflicts among these separate constituencies, and thus positive strategic planning orchestrated from bottom to top comes as an attractive alternative. Governing in this context, however, is not a simple matter, and guiding a decision process of so many constituencies over such large land areas will not come automatically.

Somewhat surprisingly, in an era when grassroots ideology runs strong, constitutionally and politically, the key instrument for positive planning strategies is now the state. A new generation of state planning efforts builds on but goes far beyond the preoccupation with environmental protection that characterized the 1970s. The idea of no growth has been replaced by *managed* growth shaped by a system of cooperating local, regional, and state authorities. In the 1980s, a parade of new or expanded state-planning laws offered a variety of models. For example:

- Florida's Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development Regulations Act (1985)
- Delaware's "Quality of Life Act" (1988)
- New Jersey's State Planning Act (1985)
- Georgia's Coordinated Planning Act (1989)

This burst of state-planning legislation represents a fresh attempt by state governments to fashion workable standards and procedures for guiding growth and development. Each state has placed new responsibilities on local governments to be explicit about land use, facilities planning, housing, economic development, transportation—the traditional elements of comprehensive planning. But instead of planning in insular fashion, communities must also engage their neighbors in the region in a common enterprise aimed at compatible goals. A new or reinvigorated regional agency frequently provides the forum for ensuring timely provision of infrastructure and public services and the right public-private "mix" in meeting the requirements for quality communities.

The role of the state varies: from Delaware, which requires detailed local planning and an "intergovernmental coordination element" (but does not provide for state review of local plans), to states like Oregon, Florida, and New Jersey, which have a more top-down style including a statewide growth management plan and a state review and approval of local plans.

Cutting across all of the recently adopted growth-management schemes are some familiar questions of planning and public policy: Who decides? Who implements? Who pays? State planning laws do not necessarily give explicit answers to all of these questions; those that try may not necessarily stand up in the heat of implementation controversy. But it is clear—and profoundly encouraging—that states are taking on these questions in a serious way, in full recognition that getting answers is an evolutionary process.

Florida's experience is perhaps indicative. Responding to some of the most intense growth pressures in the nation, Florida was an early player in passing state legislation to protect environmentally sensitive areas. More recently, its growth management act laid out three principles intended to guide future development: *consistency*, *concurrency*, and *compact development*. *Consistency* is the idea that, within a broad framework of state goals and policies, the plans of local and regional entities should be internally consistent and consistent with each other. The *concurrency* principle demands that new development should only proceed if public infrastructure—roads, water treatment, and the like—is in place to support the development, or will be installed concurrently with the new

development. The *compact development* principle calls for guiding development into designated growth areas and resisting uncontrolled development or sprawl.

State mandates such as Florida's emerge as public policy antidotes to the negative impact of the localized growth-control measures that went before. To be sure, the Florida planning law has not repealed certain verities: developers do not like to be told where they can and cannot develop; local politicians covet their autonomy; state politicians dodge if possible the responsibility to pay at least some of the price for state-mandated infrastructure. It is critical, therefore, that effective, realistic evaluations are made as to the impact of state requirements.

Are housing and economic development strategies actually making a difference for central cities and older suburbs? Do mandates to direct urban service boundaries in order to promote compact urban development and protect farm and forest lands really work? These are the challenges for the new concepts of regional planning.

### The Inevitable Alliance

In any resurgence of regional planning, public universities, particularly those located in metropolitan areas, must play a critical role. Because the states have emerged as the key actors in land use policy, these institutions are their natural allies for a variety of functions.

The most obvious is *capacity building* for public and private agencies in every area of urban planning, from fledgling neighborhood associations to the state departments that devise growth management strategies. Capacity building begins with university technical assistance in its many guises, including the training of present and future public officials on the campus or at the work site. It goes on to provide faculty help in evaluating program performance and drawing on new experiences elsewhere, and in recruiting and training of volunteers to assist in planning programs. Taken together, these exercises in capacity building are a new version of the classic extension function that schools of agriculture have carried on with distinction since the Morrill Act. The difference for the 1990s is that the public university must serve many more constituencies than the farmers, including in particular the array of planning bodies at every level.

Added to capacity building is another traditional university function—*research*. As David Sweet pointed out in volume II, issue 4 of this journal, effective extension requires a solid knowledge base. We remain surprisingly ill-informed about the urban condition. It is critical that the university provide specific, tested, and replicable strategies for improving the quality of urban life. The enhancement of the research function is a university imperative. Here the techniques and data-bank designs begun in the urban observatory program need to be refined, computerized, and systemized in ways that were nonexistent, indeed not conceivable, in the 1960s. Economic development research is a special area for attention as is public finance and program evaluation analysis. What the Urban Institute in Washington D.C. undertakes to do at the national

level needs to be tackled by every metropolitan region with a special urgency because of the new demography and the new financial constraints.

The third function for the public university as a key actor in regional planning is that of *convener*. Universities now do this all the time for specific public programs and issues ranging from educational reform to environmental matters of clean water and clean air. As an example, Boston College's Citizenship Seminars have for thirty-five years brought together leadership groups to deal with important regional topics and similar programs. University-sponsored convener activities like this are present in one way or another in almost every large metropolitan area. In the context of growth management and the new regional planning instruments, however, an even broader role is needed. Mary Ellen Mazey's article in volume II, number 3 of this journal described an excellent example of the role of Wright State University in regional planning activity.

The metropolitan university needs to identify and bring together the different constituencies that now participate in the series of decisions that shape regional direction. The diffusion and devolution of power throughout our regions have made our political processes far more pluralistic and diverse. Coalitions that once consisted only of local officials or the business elite no longer suffice. Neighborhood representation, economic sector representation, professional associations, and health and law nonprofit institutions are all now essential and legitimate partners to the exercise of growth management.

So with little real prospect for formal government reorganization within metropolitan communities, the public metropolitan university emerges as perhaps the only viable place in which to orchestrate rational strategy. Given strong support by university trustees and central administration, it has the research and scholarly resources to develop policy alternatives to critical public issues. It has staff capability to maintain databases and informational networks. Most of all, it can be a benign assembly area, a sanctuary to whom opposing political actors can repair to encounter one another in good faith before the need for confrontation arises. It need not be neutral in insisting on standards for development and identifying preferred policy options, but it must be perceived as fair and unprejudiced. This role as catalyst—authenticator of policy options, innovator, and convener—was beyond the capability of urban universities a generation ago. It was barely in place a decade ago. The experiments with big-city schools and the steady advance in capabilities found in environmental planning programs now make feasible what has always been a desirable mission for urban public universities. Building the new coalition and arming that assembly with skills and strategies that can dramatically improve the quality of urban life is now a central academic mission. Or it should be.

### *Suggested Readings*

Bowman, Ann O'M., and Richard C. Kearney. *The Resurgence of the States*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986.

Van Horn, Carl E., ed. *The State of the States*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1989.

Three journals regularly report on the issues of metropolitan growth management and potential roles for urban universities: *The Journal of the American Planning Association*, *The Journal of Urban Affairs*, and *Urban Affairs Quarterly*.