CITY PLANNING—A MAJOR FUNCTION OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

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(Summary of Remarks of Eldridge Lovelace, Partner, Harland Bartholomew & Associates, St. Louis, Mo. at Rapid City, South Dakota, on July 18, 1962.)

All of us want our cities to be good places in which to live and work, safe, efficient, pleasant and beautiful. We want them to be an ornament and not a blot on the landscape. Who is responsible for the urban environment developed in our cities? The only answer under our form of government is that everyone is responsible. Every citizen is responsible for the condition, arrangement, for the environment we provide in our cities. However, our municipal governments are primarily responsible. They are elected by the people to manage local affairs, and management of local affairs includes the responsibility for the development of the best possible type of urban environment.

The cities of today are a heritage of several generations of past effort. They are a collection, a conglomeration, of subdivisions, of buildings, of streets, sewers, water mains, etc. built by past generations. One thing that we know from looking at them is that almost everything built in a city lasts for quite a long time. If we approve a new subdivision it may be with us for a century or two, a new shopping center may be with us for several generations. The decisions made today are important not just for today but for tomorrow also.

The responsible municipal official is consequently presented with heavy responsibilities in the making of decisions that effect urban environment both for today and for tomorrow. Let us look at two examples.
It is not unusual, and particularly in a city growing as rapidly as Rapid City, for a city council or a planning commission to have to pass upon and approve a new subdivision plat. In fact, this happens almost every week. When the subdivision plat is approved, the streets laid out, and houses built, it provides a pattern that will be with the community for possibly one or two hundred years. In deciding whether or not to approve a new subdivision, the city official is making a determination of the sizes of lots and of the lot arrangements. He is asked to decide whether or not this land needs to provide for extension or opening of a major street or thoroughfare; he needs to know about the schools both existing and future — are the streets leading to them or away from them in the proper directions? — he needs to know about the sewer and water facilities of the urban area, is the subdivided area one in which we can provide sanitary sewers economically, is it one easy to serve by water, is it going to provide its own facilities of this type now but require these extensions later? Does the subdivision provide adequate storm drainage facilities, particularly those that will be needed to carry the run-off from the entire water shed when all of it is developed? Who is going to pay for the storm drainage, for the sewer, for the water? What is the city policy on these things? All of these factors affect the decision as to whether or not this new subdivision plat is approved.

Similar questions come up when a petition is brought forth for changing of zoning regulations. Will the proposed new shopping center fit into the best land use plan for the community? What
will be its effect on traffic? What will its effect be on the future use of lands around it? Will it depreciate values or will it constitute a part of a satisfactory and logical neighborhood that could be developed on the surrounding lands?

These are not unusual questions. These are the types of questions that are presented to municipal officials every day. It is impossible to give a satisfactory or logical answer to questions of this type without having some type of a picture or plan for the future development of the city. The subdivision plat, the new building, each must fit in and be coordinated with some type of a logical and sensible arrangement of the future city on the land. Somehow or other there must be some type of a plan or a picture in considerable detail of what the city of the future should be. Otherwise, the result will be waste, chaos, and an urban environment much less satisfactory than it should be.

Now, unfortunately, no one can foresee the future with any great degree of accuracy. However, the fact that perfection is not attainable is not sufficient reason not to use all of the forethought of which we are capable. We have to try to do the best we can to foresee what the future will bring. In order to build a good city in the future, we must be able to adjust what we do today to some future pattern. We cannot make this adjustment in the future but must make it today. We cannot postpone the decisions of today but rather must apply to them the greatest amount of wisdom of which we are capable.
A deeper problem is involved here, however, than the mere problem of making as intelligent a decision as possible upon the affairs of the moment. Our urban areas are highly competitive. The cities that will move ahead in the future are those that will provide the best living and working conditions along with the most reasonable taxes. This is a most difficult objective to achieve. But, if the community is to continue to grow and prosper, it must have a positive program for its development and improvement.

We can't continue to build a city by either making improvements when a minority vociferously demands them or when the need is so overwhelming that a municipal disaster will result if they are not fulfilled. No industrial enterprise could operate in this manner and a successful city cannot be built in this manner in our competitive society. Instead, we must schedule capital improvements in advance in accordance with a sound appraisal of over-all needs and build the community positively in accordance with an over-all plan and program for community improvement.

**Planning is a Major Municipal Responsibility**

By and large our cities are developed by private individuals and corporations. These build new buildings from time to time and replace or convert old buildings. Serving this basic arrangement of private buildings are municipal services and facilities such as streets, water lines, police and fire protection, etc. The quality of the city is determined by how well the pattern of private buildings and the ancillary systems of municipal facilities are arranged together on the site of the city. Each of these individual buildings and facilities, most of which are quite small, must be related to an
over-all plan if the total complex is to be successful. To see that all of these different private and public actions are coor-
dinated and coordinated continuously is a very important function of municipal government.

It is self-evident that this function must be continuous. The city is built continuously. Every day something is done, something happens. If the proper degree of coordination is to be obtained, the planning must be applied to each of these daily actions. It must be an integral part of the day-to-day functioning of the municipal government.

Secondly, the planning, if it is to be successful, must be comprehensive. It must take into consideration all of the various economic and social factors affecting the community. It must look ahead reasonably to the prospects for future growth. It must be carefully related to the topography and geology of the site, taking realistic accounts of such factors as storm drainage and wind and weather conditions. And then, it must encompass all the various public and private activities that affect the physical pattern and layout of the community. If major elements are ignored or forgotten, the result will be a less successful planning effort.

To do all this is a big job and a most important one. Because it is such a sizeable undertaking, most cities have established planning departments. These are usually on a par with the police department or fire department or public works department. At the head of the planning department is an experienced planner who directs a staff in providing information, coordination and regulation of the various facets that make up the physical development of the city.
This department provides to the planning commission and to the other responsible public officials the needed data and plans on which to base the answers to the current questions. But more important than this, such a department prepares and keeps up-to-date a program for the progressive development and improvement of the physical aspects of the municipality.

Planning Requires a Plan

Experience of many cities conclusively shows that city planning cannot be done effectively in the absence of a comprehensive city plan. Unless all of the various aspects that affect the development of the municipality are thoroughly studied and analyzed, unless realistic projections are made of future needs, unless some type of a comprehensive over-all plan showing the disposition of land uses and the systems of public facilities and services is developed then it is impossible to relate things that are occurring today to what the city of tomorrow should be and intelligent decisions cannot be made. Furthermore, without some chart of the total objective, it is not possible to prepare a program and to substantiate what should be done first.

A comprehensive plan, however, is not an inflexible straight jacket into which we are going to try to pour the form of the future city. The plan is based on a consideration of all the necessary topographic, geologic, economic and social factors. It shows a harmonious interrelationship of public service facilities and land use. This relationship, however, may be changed and adjusted and may be improved, once it has been established. Thus, a city plan
is not inflexible; it can be changed and revised so that it always represents the latest and best thinking for the future of the city. However, each revision and each adjustment should improve the relationship of the various elements in the plan and should provide for an improved environment for the people of the community.

The comprehensive plan should be a legal document. It must be officially recognized as the objective for all private and public actions for the building of the city. As changes occur, the official plan is amended in much the same manner a zoning ordinance or map is amended. But there is always available an official over-all comprehensive plan that may be referred to and which can guide the decisions of both public and private individuals that are building the city.

Experience in carrying out comprehensive plans indicates that the great majority of both public and private decisions can easily be made to conform with the plan. Absence of a well-known official plan and lack of knowledge of such a plan is a major obstacle. Where a plan is available and is known, much of the city's development will be coordinated with it almost automatically.

Scope of a City Plan

Comprehensive plans must look into the future, but how far into the future should they look? With our rapidly changing technology, it seems impractical to endeavor to look ahead much longer than twenty-or twenty-five years. What area should be planned? Certainly, not just the area within the city limits because the city limits seldom include the entire area that is being subjected to urbanization. Rather, the entire future urban area should be included in the plan. This consists of areas both within and beyond the present
city limits.

Generally, a comprehensive city plan consists of four major items which may be briefly described as follows:

1. Basic Community Pattern

Cities exist because they provide goods or services to persons living beyond. An understanding of the basic economy and how it might change in the future is the first step in the preparation of a city plan. Based on the future economy, estimates should be made of the probable future growth of the community. Whether we plan a city of 100,000 or 250,000 or 500,000 will make a great difference in the details of the plan itself.

Determination of the scale of future growth then leads to an analysis of the site of the city, its topography, its drainage features, its geology. The topography of Rapid City is an unusually difficult one on which to build a city. At the same time the difficulties of the topography are such as would, if properly used, bring about an unusually attractive urban area. Studies of existing land use and past trends will indicate the probable amount of land that will be needed for residential, commercial, industrial, public, and semi-public, and park uses in the future. We know that we cannot transform the existing community overnight but will have to use it as a basis for the city of the future. Based upon what is here now and the amount of growth anticipated, we can then make diagrams and plans showing the most logical arrangement of the various land uses on the site of the city. These studies together comprise the proposals for the basic community pattern, the essential first step in developing the city plan.
2. Direction of Private Development

Coordination of private development with a comprehensive plan is brought about primarily by two types of regulations, zoning and subdivision control. Development of comprehensive zoning regulations, bringing private land use into coordination with the comprehensive plan, is one of the most important phases of the planning program. The community will grow by laying out of new subdivisions and through the procedures for approval of new subdivisions these may also be brought into adjustment with the plan. Other regulations include minimum housing standards and building regulations, both of which are important to the development of a satisfactory city. These various regulatory measures constitute the methods that are used to direct private development in accordance with a city plan.

3. Coordination of Public Improvements

The third aspect of a planning program includes the plans for public facilities and improvements - such things as the street system, the public utilities system, (i.e. sewer, water, and storm drainage) schools, parks, transportation facilities, and public buildings. We are an automotive society and the planning of the street system itself is a most important aspect of any planning program. Here it is necessary to coordinate the major thoroughfare plan with proposals of the state highway department. Analyses of traffic movements are essential and through use of recently developed techniques, it is possible to project future traffic volumes according to the future land use plan and determine with some exactitude the adequacy of a proposed major thoroughfare plan.
4. Financing and Implementing Measures

The final part of a comprehensive plan is the program required to carry it out. This includes analyses of certain aspects of the local governments structure, including where appropriate an annexation program. The most important part is a capital expenditure program showing progressively on a step-by-step basis which projects should be built and how they should be financed. Such a program includes a broad consideration of all needs for public improvements and places these on a program basis instead of a hit-or-miss basis.

Finally, analyses are made of the methods of bringing about coordination of action between the local, state and federal agencies that will be involved in the building of the city. Through the new processes of urban renewal, it is possible to transform rundown portions of the city. This portion of a plan should include an analysis of the extent to which this process might advantageously be used in the improvement of the community.

A Planning Program for Rapid City

Rapid City is several decades behind the average American city in its planning program. The city is one of the most rapidly growing communities in the United States. While it has a planning commission, the city plan made a number of years ago is now obsolete. There is no planning staff. Much needs to be done and needs to be done right away. The combination of the rapid growth, lack of an up-to-date comprehensive plan and lack of any technical staff can only lead to trouble in the community's physical development. Some of this has already occurred in connection with storm drainage.
There are alternatives leading to a solution of this problem. These may be briefly described as follows:

1. The city could develop a local staff consisting of an experienced planner, an assistant planner, one or two draftsmen and a secretary. They could be charged with handling planning problems on a day-to-day basis and with gradually developing a comprehensive plan. Major difficulties here are that the necessary experience to enable a person to cope with the planning programs of Rapid City would require that the planner be paid a salary completely out of proportion with that of other department heads. Furthermore, it would be difficult to recruit a person with this ability because of the extreme shortage of qualified planning personnel in the United States. Under such an arrangement there could be no guarantee that a satisfactory city plan would be completed.

2. A local staff could be set up, headed by a planner with, perhaps, not too much experience, and then the services of a consulting firm could be engaged to assist the local staff with the consulting firm providing the depth of experience required.

3. The third alternative would call for placing the responsibility for the development of the plan and the placing of qualified personnel in the city in the hands of an experienced planning consultant. On this basis, the consultant would develop a comprehensive
plan, as generally described in the preceding parts of this statement, and would place within the community an experienced planner who would direct the work of preparing the plan, and who would then be available to remain in the community to assist in carrying out the plan and in the establishment of the planning staff and planning department after the plan has been completed.

In considering the three possible alternatives, complete use of a local staff, complete use of a consultant or development of the plan partly by a staff and partly by a consultant, the community should be guided primarily by the speed with which the planning program is needed. It would appear that this need is quite extreme and that everything possible should be done to place a planning program in operation as soon as possible.

The Planning Department and How it Would Function

Irrespective of the method followed to initiate a planning program, the ultimate result must be a planning staff as an integral part of the structure of municipal government. This staff should be headed by a qualified city planner who would be head of a department of planning and be of a stature in municipal affairs comparable to other department heads. There should be an official city plan kept up-to-date by this staff.

It would be desirable that Rapid City be able to undertake official planning as provided for in the South Dakota City Planning Enabling Act. Unfortunately, an affirmative referendum to place this act in operation has yet to occur. However, it is hoped
that as the community becomes more educated as to the benefits of a planning program, this affirmative referendum might be obtained.

The city planner and his staff would keep the comprehensive plan current and up-to-date, would make the necessary basic planning studies required to do this and would provide advice to public officials and to citizens in connection with the plan on a day-to-day basis. He would generally enable the municipality to fulfill its responsibility of bringing about a more coordinated, harmonious and better urban environment in the Rapid City area.

**Summary**

With an up-to-date comprehensive plan and a planning staff as a city department, the city would then have available a vigorous planning program. When new subdivisions were presented, questions as to how they related to the best future use of property within the city could be answered. The planning department would review subdivision plans, compare them carefully with the comprehensive plan, make sure that they provided the necessary storm drainage, traffic circulation, school sites, park sites, etc. that were required - before they were approved. The planner would also review applications for changes in zoning regulations and relate these to the plan and provide substantive reports to the planning commission and city council as to how the action on the proposals would fit into the optimum development of the community.

Because of the many interests involved, both public and private, in carrying out a coordinated city-planning program, real accomplishment can be made only after numerous public controversies. Planning is controversial because the recommendations of any satisfactory comprehensive plan will interfere with the ideas of part of the
population.

If a planning program is to succeed, it consequently must be broadly based upon a wide public understanding and support of the plan and of the program. This requires, in turn, a wide public participation in the preparation of the plan and a wide public knowledge of planning and of the planning program. In the preparation of a comprehensive plan there should be a large citizens' advisory committee to assist in the development of the program. There should be many public meetings and public hearings. There should be wide publicity regarding the plan and the proposals. Insofar as possible, the interest and the cooperation of every citizen should be obtained.

Finally, it must be emphasized that to be completely successful, the planning program, including the public participation and public education features, must be continuous. It is not any kind of a "one-shot" deal but rather it is the establishment of a procedure and a process as an integral part of municipal affairs that will be kept up day after day and decade after decade. This is the manner in which we build cities and the only process by which we may improve them.