CHURCHES

ZONING: DESIGN BY MUNICIPAL BY-LAW
by Louis Justement, FAIA

POLITICS AND PLANNING
by Fredrick Gutheim
POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER
OF MARYLAND

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We have had zoning in the District of Columbia for nearly 40 years, somewhat less than that in the suburbs. Has it made any real contribution from the point of view of the design of individual buildings, the planning of neighborhoods, the appearance of neighborhoods, the pleasure and convenience of living, the safety of life?

What would the city be like if we had had no zoning or if we had limited its effects to a few major factors instead of adding regulation to regulation?

Have we gained anything by substituting the well-meaning dictatorship of the bureaucrat for the stumbling ignorance and indifference of the speculative builder in pursuit of profit?

Have we been restraining the wrong culprits and, in effect, aiding and abetting the efforts of the real offenders?

If the above questions seem impertinent, why is it that Georgetown, which was built for 150 years — or thereabouts — without benefit of zoning is still one of the most prized neighborhoods of the entire metropolitan area?

Is it time to take a second look at zoning, as we did at the 18th Amendment to the Constitution (remember?) and ask ourselves whether, after all, it, too, is only a "noble experiment"?

In an attempt to answer the last question, let us try to answer some of the questions asked in the opening paragraphs of this article:

Design of Individual Buildings

The design of individual buildings has never been an avowed concern of the zoning regulator — lest his regulation be declared unconstitutional. The average citizen has always hoped, however, that a by-product of zoning would be more attractive buildings. In any event the answer to this question is easy: Insofar as any effect is apparent it is negative: the architect is never encouraged to create good design but his best efforts are frequently thwarted by arbitrary regulations.

Planning of Neighborhoods:

How does one make a good plan for a neighborhood if, because of zoning, it is to consist entirely of detached houses and if, because of economic factors, it is to consist of houses in a single price class?

Appearance of Neighborhoods:

The appearance of a neighborhood "planned" as per the preceding paragraph can only be saved from the "urban sprawl" look if it consists of the mistakes of individuals or the mistakes of small-scale developers. If the really big operator appears on the scene — and this seems to be the rule rather than the exception — the results are dismal: good design, endlessly repeated, is boring; and bad design, endlessly repeated, is terrible: it is the urban sprawl which surrounds the city on all sides.

Pleasure and Convenience of Living:

If the walk-to-work man disappears from the scene. The auto takes over.

Safety of Life:

Not only does the auto add directly to the danger of life and limb through traffic accidents: the streets, now deserted by the pedestrian, add another danger. See the article on "Violence in the City Streets" by Jane Jacobs in the September Harper's Magazine.

Conclusion:

Some of the most pleasant neighborhoods in the Washington Metropolitan Area are those which have been built without benefit of zoning: Georgetown and the older portions of Chevy Chase, Maryland, for instance. Some of the most dreary residential areas are those which have benefited from zoning since their inception, such as the Viers Mill Road area. Some of the worst commercial areas, on the other hand, are those which were substantially completed before the advent of zoning, such as the Cottage City section of Bladensburg Road.

I do not claim to know the answer to the problem of zoning. But my observations have led me to believe that we should begin to learn from our experience in this field. As a beginning, both planners and zoning officials — and the citizenry they are trying to please — should display more humility than they have in the past. It would be most refreshing if we would begin to reap some of the needless regulations and red tape and think twice before adding a new regulation, no matter how urgent it may appear at the time.

As long as buildings are built mistakes will be made. Insofar as possible they should be the mistakes of individuals rather than the mistakes of city planners. For the mistakes of individuals are usually made on a retail basis whereas the mistakes of city planners are, by their very nature, made on a wholesale basis.

Trinity Church, on Church Creek, just south of Cambridge, Maryland, was built in 1690. The congregation then came to services mostly by boat on the waters of the creek. It has recently been restored through the generosity of Mrs. Edgar W. Garbisch, daughter of Walter P. Chrisler, in honor of her parents.

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CHURCH

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Pastor: Reverend D. Hobart Evans
Construction cost: $263,000
Architects: Elliott & Maclntire
Politics and Planning

by Frederick Gutheim

President, Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies

Planning is of interest to politicians as it influences voting; as it changes the established power structure in executive departments; as it alters the value of land; as it affects taxes and tax rates; as it causes the migration of substantial numbers of people; and as it offers evidence of success or failure in governmental stewardship. Other considerations might be mentioned, but these are sufficient to introduce the subject of the relationship of politics to planning. Planning must be considered in relation to cities, to metropolitan regions, to larger areas defined by river basins or natural resources. It should also be recognized that planning for central business districts, for suburban communities, for industrial areas, or for transportation, urban development, housing, or other special purposes—each will present its own special aspects and interests. All, however, must have some relationship to the future, and to intelligent foresight into the future, if we are to consider them planning. And for the purposes of this paper, we should be concerned with comprehensive, multi-purpose planning rather than with more limited programs.

Henry Adams observed that practical politics consists in ignoring the facts. It may consist in more or less successful endeavors to conceal the facts, or to make them appear to mean something else, but I think it is impossible today for practical politics to ignore the facts. Further, it appears to me that more and more politicians are interested in the future, and are willing to put political bets on it, as distinguished from a more shortsighted and immediate concern with the next election, or tomorrow's vote. I might also risk the observation that while politicians are closely attuned to the immediate interests and concerns of their constituents, and reflect these in what they say and do, they are less likely to be fooled into thinking this is the whole story. For one thing, they often hear both sides of the story; for another, they know there will be a day of reckoning. These are some reasons for the growing sympathetic relationship between politics and planning.

Planners, too, are most interested in politics. Having worked for politicians most of my life, I believe I can say this was not always so. Planners used to think of themselves as designers, makers of plans, creators of the city beautiful. They were employed by city planning commissions organized deliberately in order to set them apart from the presumably corrupting influences of city hall. Their plans often graced the wall, or filled the filing cabinet, but—despite notable exceptions, such as Burnham's Chicago plan—frequently failed to be carried out. These experiences grew to stigmatize the entire planning profession. (Robert Walker, "The Planning Function in Urban Government," was the best critic.) They were notably responsible for the almost universal scrapping of planning work at the beginning of the Great Depression—at the very moment when, because of the work relief and public works programs, planning was most needed.

Planners swung the other way. They embraced that awful word "effectuation" with unabashed enthusiasm; they even set up jobs in planning offices for "effectuators." The acid test of a plan was whether it was executed; the criterion of professional success whether a planner "got results." Even politics received the corresponding and deplorable neglect of those worthy inheritances from the profession of architecture: good drawing, models, careful presentation, well-written and printed papers. Instead, we were adrift in a world of mimeographed and badly written reports, a gash of technical language, public relations, and pseudo-public relations. From this period, I think we are now emerging. There is still a desire to appear practical, but generally planners are sufficiently secure, are now paid enough, and have a strong enough position in the power structure to be more relaxed and more willing to be concerned with their proper job.

The planner in a governmental structure today is well aware of how he can contribute to that work. He has such tools as the capital budget, the master plan of public works, the mandatory review, with which to exercise his influence over current work; and he has increasingly the techniques of public reporting and public relations with which to develop "a third force" of independent political strength based on the facts and on independent professional judgment. In his relation to legislative bodies, to city councils, the planner has also developed a surprising strength. Where he has established what might be termed a consultative relation to such bodies, he has contributed enormously to grounding political "electricity" by relating specific controversial subjects to more comprehensive and long-range factors. Where the issues have been closely drawn—and they frequently are—consideration in this broader frame of reference is frequently decisive.

Among the questions worth discussing in this context is whether it is possible or desirable to undertake metropolitan planning without creating first some framework of metropolitan government. I feel that experience strongly argues that much metropolitan planning can be done prior to the creation of any specific metropolitan government with powers. (I was unsuccessful several years ago in persuading the city of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Institute of State and Local Government that this was the case; but perhaps they feel differently now that they have had their premature try in Harrisburg to get metropolitan powers for the city of Philadelphia.) Indeed, metropolitan planning will help to develop an awareness of the need for such governmental structure and to specify more exactly what powers it should have and how it should be related to the other layers of government. Plunging directly into the creation of metropolitan government may even lead, if successful at all, to the neglect of the most promising roles of such new governmental forms. This seems to have been the experience in Toronto, and perhaps in metropolitan Miami. By contrast, and without regard to the racial implications of that decision, the creation of the metropolitan consolidation of Nashville and Davidson County was strongly helped by the work of the planning agency. It may be assumed, I think, that the metropolitan region has certain characteristic political interests and problems. It is with these that metropolitan planning must deal. I might identify them most readily as the problems of the central city, of the suburban periphery, and of the metropolitan region as an integrated whole.

In the central city the problems arising from metropolitan growth and expansion are those of congestion, as a limited central area must accommodate more and more activities; of change, as industry and much retailing leave for the suburbs and office building activities and more specialized trading find places in the city; and of the movement of people and
goods, including mass transportation, expressways, and parking.

In the suburban areas, the problems arise chiefly as the result of growth, and typically are those of a shortage of governmental services; the need for orderly planning and scheduling of new activities and facilities; and overcoming the political fragmentation and arbitrary character of highly specialized residential or industrial communities, and the financial, racial, and other difficulties this imposes.

The metropolitan community as a whole can be dealt with only when some means are found for dealing with its governmental problems. Some of the customary ways this can be done (without regard to their political feasibility) are (1) annexation; (2) the creation of functional authorities; (3) the creation of multi-purpose or general metropolitan authorities; (4) city-county consolidation; and (5) the borough plan of metropolitan government. Short of some form of metropolitan government, progress can be made by various forms of private or public efforts to survey the metropolitan community or to engage in metropolitan regional planning.

Since the monumental study directed by Coleman Woodbury, published five years ago, we have been wary of looking at the superficial evidences of slums and blighted areas as being of themselves metropolitan problems. Instead, we suppose they are evidences of racial migration, industrial location and change, organizational defects, and other underlying factors. This line of thinking is being deepened and broadened by the contemporary group of studies by ACTION, not least by that by Professors Banfield and Grodzins just published. This unconventional argument contends that metropolitan government itself is a reactionary movement.

Yet we must remember that it is with symptoms that people and their political leaders are concerned. Slums and bad housing, poor residential neighborhoods, are where it hurts most. We may be able to persuade them that the proper treatment is of the underlying malady, but I think we can ignore symptoms only at the peril of forfeiting the patient's confidence and faith in our understanding of his difficulty. If our remedies for metropolitan difficulties are to be acceptable, we will have to make sure that they affect the symptoms. And they do not produce worse symptoms! The cure for downtown congestion is not a deserted city. The remedy for slums in the central city is not embryonic slums in the suburbs. Short-run highway solutions may lead only to worse difficulties.

Even the briefest treatment of this subject cannot neglect to mention the interest of the federal government in metropolitan planning. Initially, and most obviously, this derives from the fact that Title VII of the Housing Act of 1954, amended, provides the main grants in aid for metropolitan planning—poorly as these have been handled. More fundamentally, it arises from the fact that so many federal programs have as their end result the location of post offices or federal buildings in cities; the approval of federally aided programs of roads, airports, hospitals, housing, or urban redevelopment; the impact of federal policies of the regulation of transportation, communication of trade; the underwriting of such urban enterprises as housing. The federal investment in the metropolitan areas of the United States today is probably well over twenty-five billion dollars. And there is no federal policy for cities and metropolitan areas, no effort to coordinate or direct these federal programs and interests in ways that contribute to the betterment of cities. Examples are abundant of federal agencies that ignore local planning. The policy of the Eisenhower administration, and of the Bureau of the Budget, was to ignore these issues or to pretend that some form of improved federal-state relations might ultimately improve them. The one effort of the Bureau of the Budget to establish a regional office with the avowed purpose of exploring what could be done to coordinate the short-sighted and narrow programs of federal bureaus was abandoned. Under the circumstances, the federal relations to cities and metropolitan areas are not innocuously negative; they are positively divisive and disturbing. Even individual agencies and their programs are hopelessly enmeshed with metropolitan interests as, for example, civil defense. A survey of this situation, what it means, and what should be done about it, deserves a high place on the Congressional agenda.

Let me conclude these rather brief comments by some observations on the planning process. You have an excellent illustration of that in Pittsburgh where the Golden Triangle project exercised an influence upon much broader planning long before it was ever realized. The same force operates in plans of a larger significance than this limited measure of redevelopment.

So long as a plan represents a valid set of facts and principles; so long as it is accepted as a political agreement; so long as it is an expression of popular determination—it must be reckoned with in the decision-making process. When it loses that authority it is finished as a plan. This conception of planning is one reason I am seldom much concerned with the legal status, or lack of it, of much metropolitan planning. Once you get over the money hurdle, the measure of planning's effectiveness is pretty directly related to how good the plans are rather than to the political strength that enforces them. I think it is easiest to see planning in this sense as comparable to organization or to budgeting—a set of influential guide lines rather than an inflexible document. We can reorganize, change the budget, or change the plan—but only where there is a good reason for doing it. This idea is horrifying to architects, engineers, or other people who look at planning as a kind of contract which, once it is accepted, is not to be changed because it has become the organizing instrument for work.

If we have plans, or perhaps you would prefer to call them planning policies, they also become the subject of political debate. Mayor Lee found this out in New Haven. Candidates were recently running for office in Miami with different conceptions of metropolitan government as their platforms. Cities are now beginning to find themselves in a trading position with suburban communities in the state legislatures.

To sum up, then, metropolitan planning must deal with the political issues of metropolitan growth and expansion and it must find political ways of getting its plans into action—whether these are short of the creation of some form of metropolitan government or actually propose such forms of government. If it deals with anything less than the whole range of metropolitan interests, it will cease to be accepted as metropolitan planning and become something else, as has been the case with private metropolitan planning efforts in Chicago, New York, and some other cities. And at that stage it is neither planning nor politics.
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