

UNDERLYING IDEAS
IN REGIONAL PLANNING FOR WATER RESOURCES
WITHIN THE LAKE ERIE BASIN

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In another state, far across the country, where water problems are of urgent concern, the new Director of Water Resources is quoted as saying, "Water quality and regional development are on a collision course." If this is true -- and even a cursory glance at any major river basin in the United States indicates that it is -- there is good reason for us meeting here today. We are here to consider whether, by rational planning, regional development can accelerate and water quality improve. We shall be thinking about institutional arrangements that will bring regional planners and water management experts into continuing dialog. For it is from such dialog that we hope to discover how to steer away from the threatened collision.

In regional planning for water resources we seek the best of all possible worlds: one where planners will resolve the inevitable conflicts between opposing interests, opposing aims -- between development and non-development, between wise use and profligate tendencies, between economic necessity and idealistic philosophy.

From the "city beautiful" movement of the turn of the century, the concept of planning has come to embrace man's total environment. The purpose of today's comprehensive planning is to devise a pattern for economic and physical development and redevelopment, harmonious and well-balanced in its use of land and water. Planners suggest corrective measures for existing problems and recommend priorities for capital improvement programs in order to guide growth along orderly lines.

You have all had some experience with local planning. You know that in the course of preparing a long-range comprehensive master (or development) plan, the community takes stock of its assets and liabilities, determines its needs and goals, and formulates a program to achieve these goals. The master plan is a flexible guide for the making of all developmental decisions, public and private, but it rests on many earlier expressions of community preference, on many choices between incompatible aspirations, on compromises and adjustments to gain necessary public support.

Planning is primarily an advisory function carried out by professionals. Planning is a governmental function because these professionals report to a board or commission of elected officials or appointed citizens. In most states, (state) enabling legislation, usually permissive rather than mandatory, is the source of authority to establish a planning agency at municipal, county or regional levels.

Regional planning is designed to cope with problems that cannot be solved adequately by a single town, city, county, or even state. Implicit in everything we have heard thus far today is the hypothesis that regional planning which integretes water and land use is essential. In recent years there has been increasing acceptance of the idea that planning and management of water and related land resources are best accomplished through some type of organization that cuts across traditional political boundaries and deals with resources in their geographic unity. To put this idea into practice has proved extraordinarily difficult.

In the absence of a comprehensive plan, water management and land use programs and policies of separate jurisdictions frequently conflict to the point where plans of one are negated by action or inaction in another. Generally

speaking, a metropolitan area or a watershed would be better served by a unified plan for its section of a body of water, by a plan that takes into account the many needs for water and provides for the full variety of uses. Yet there are few places where such a plan is being applied. Does your watershed have and use such a plan? Does any metropolitan area in the Lake Erie Basin follow a unified plan? If not, why is there this delay in applying an idea whose time seems to have come?

In planning for the Huron River, the Detroit Metropolitan Area, the Maumee Basin, the Three Rivers Watershed -- which you know includes the Cuyahoga-Rocky-Chagrin basins -- for the greater Erie area in Pennsylvania, or for Erie County, New York, planners must cope with all the usual problems of decision-making mentioned for a municipal or county master plan. But a unified plan for the water resources of a metropolitan area or a watershed has an added complication in the dissimilarity between "political realm" and "natural setting." Natural boundaries must be taken into account. Topography may unite what jurisdictional lines have separated. Yet old rivalries die hard. Communities within a metropolitan area or a watershed continue to regard their neighbors as ^{competitors} ~~competitors~~ in the race for ~~rateables~~ to increase that never-adequate tax base. Agreement on equitable financing and equitable voice in decision-making often prove more difficult than engineering decisions.

All too often regional water plans are drawn up by representatives of vested interests, by professional water and sewer engineers from municipalities, by industrial engineers, etc. rather than by water resource and land use planners whose aim is to find the best utilization of the resource for the entire region. Even within metropolitan planning agencies free from parochial prejudice, it is often necessary to take great care to offend none of the governmental units involved,

lest funds, as well as cooperation, be withdrawn. The result is likely to be a plan that lacks creativity or drama, and thus fails to capture the imagination of the public.

Unfortunately, only a few metro residents think of the body of water that serves the area as "our river" or "our lake." Most citizens have no interest in problems of pollution or pollution abatement, are unconcerned about plans to dam the river. Uninvolvement is especially pronounced in metropolitan areas, which occupy the smallest land area in the river or lake basin but contain the greatest number of people. But whatever level of government is doing the planning, most plans for water resource development are made without much citizen participation. Whether the planning is for the metro area or for a watershed, by the time plans for a water project reach the public-hearing stage, so much has been committed to the project that the citizen's protest is, in most cases, ineffective. ~~Joe and Jane~~^{the} Public become interested too late, if at all.

The first step toward achieving regional water resource planning is to develop a truly creative regional plan; the second is to involve the people of the region. The third step is to establish some institutional arrangement, not only for making the plan but for putting ^{it} into effect.

By this time a considerable body of literature exists on the economic and engineering aspects of water quality management. Clearly not all the problems in engineering and economics have been solved. Yet we have moved much farther ahead in these aspects than in our ability to devise legal and institutional arrangements that will give effective, efficient, and politically responsible implementation of water management programs. In developing governmental machinery we are still in the period of trial and error. No well-established pattern exists for legal and institutional approaches to water quality management on a regional basis, though later today we will hear about some arrangement being tried in the Lake Erie Basin.

What would we require of a governmental arrangement that is to develop a truly regional plan, involve the people of the region, and so manage the water resources that regional development and improvement in water quality go hand in hand?

To do all this, our governmental arrangement would seem to need great scope. It will need flexibility and creativity to work with many possible alternatives because regional management makes practical the use of large-scale and special methods such as direct treatment of streams, waste collection from distant sources for treatment in central plants, off-site disposal of wastes, and river flow-regulation through interbasin transfer and reservoir storage and releases. Our governmental arrangement will need flexibility and creativity to really come to grips with multipurpose use of water bodies, perhaps through preserving certain streams or sections of streams for recreation while using others more heavily for waste disposal.

We hear a great deal about comprehensive plans. Indeed, we in the League are very fond of this term. We use it in our statement of position, where we say, "In order to meet the present and future/^{water}needs of the people of the United States, the League of Women Voters believes ... comprehensive planning, development and water management on a regional basis is essential to the optimum development of the nation's water resources."

But can regional planning for water resources be comprehensive if it includes the multiple uses of water but not the general uses of land? Clearly the location of industries and recreation areas will affect costs of water supply and waste disposal in the metropolitan area or the stream's watershed. The effects of land use choices on water management must be evaluated. The evaluation must be given weight in location decisions of industry and in land-use planning by local, state and regional planning agencies. Stream specialization to provide

high quality recreation opportunities, for example, will be impossible without appropriate control of land use.

Our governmental machinery for comprehensive regional planning for water resources will need to deal with land use controls and to influence both public and private decision-making wherever the two are interdependent. It will need a source of funds based on equitable distribution of costs in relation to benefits.

Yet there is a natural reluctance to give a new and experimental governmental arrangement the powers it needs for comprehensive management of water resources and related land use. Present governmental bodies are reluctant to diminish their own powers by sharing them with a regional body. Voters are reluctant to create institutional machinery without being able to see clearly how it will remain under their control. Perhaps it is no wonder that establishing an effective institutional arrangement for putting the comprehensive plan into effect remains the biggest barrier to applying a concept I am sure we all accept as necessary and good in theory.

To summarize -- and certainly to oversimplify -- it seems to me that what we concerned citizens want in regional planning for water resources is a comprehensive plan that gives full consideration to the water and related land resources of the area and that involves citizens in the decision-making. We want planners to provide us laymen with the information we need to make the hard choices from which there is no turning back. We want to know ahead of time the inconveniences, the regulations, and the costs that are involved. We want to be prepared to pay the price when we commit ourselves to the final goal.

Along with the pragmatism and realism on which the League of Women Voters prides itself, we recognize that we need the lift of the spirit that comes with planning for a better future. We want planners to give us this inspiration, to raise our sights. You remember that it was one of the first city planners who said, "Make no little plans for they have no magic to stir men's souls." To this thought in this day and age when planning becomes increasingly essential and important, we can but echo a fervent "Amen."