

# How Effective the Master Plan?

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## **ABSTRACT**

Far from being an irrelevant appendage, a master plan is essential if municipalities are to guide their development in a rational manner. To be effective, a master plan must be officially adopted by the local governing body as the foundation stone of an adequately financed continuing planning process. The master plan's validity is not negated by recognition of the regional impact of local land use decisions and of the need to address social and economic goals.

In recent years, with considerable justification based on experience, but with very little thought, it has become increasingly fashionable to declare open season on the Master Plan.<sup>1</sup> In a simplistic exercise, spurred on by cost-benefit experts in the Federal Government, the actual course of events was repeatedly compared with a long-since prepared frozen document, called "The Master Plan," and every divergence between the two was entered as a debit to the latter. Since, by definition, it can be assumed that the course of events in a dynamic democratic society will never accord with any preconceived fixed blueprint, this type of analysis could not fail to reach the conclusion that the Master Plan is a totally ineffective document.

## **Purpose of a Plan**

But is the Master Plan really supposed to be a map showing the pattern of land use development at some distant point in the future, accompanied

by a set of general policies intended to enable the particular community to achieve that "end state?" Is any experienced, rational planner ever bent on determining, once and for all, what the shape of a community should be in the distant future? And does any such planner ever really expect that the community will bend all efforts to achieve such a preconceived end state outside of the normal political process?

The validity of the attack on the Master Plan is directly proportional to the extent to which the Master Plan concept is a rigid one, incapable of accommodating change which flows from the unfolding development process. The rigidity of this concept, in turn, is a function of the way the Master Plan is viewed and used. Insecure planners look to the Master Plan for the certainty which they need to be able to function. Politicians, on the other hand, who are impatient with any impediment to the realization of some immediate goal, prefer to ignore the Master Plan's flexibility in favor of discrediting it altogether. The unhappy accumulated experience with both categories of users of the Master Plan is at the core of current criticism.

But then, the Master Plan was conceived neither for the benefit of insecure planners, nor to facilitate opportunistic decisions by political leaders. Its purpose is to guide the future development and redevelopment of communities in some rational manner. It is supposed to be the cornerstone of "the process of consciously exercising rational control over the development of the physical environment, and of certain aspects of the social environment, in the light of a common scheme of values, goals, and assumptions" which we call planning.<sup>2</sup> It was born out of concern with the obvious chaos which results from allowing events to take their natural haphazard course. There is no evidence that, in the absence of planning, cities today evolve into other than chaotic agglomerations—insensitive to the wellbeing of their residents and users of their facilities, insensitive to the welfare of the businesses and industries which constitute their main economic underpinnings, insensitive, indeed, to their very stability and self-preservation.

### **Effects of a Plan**

At this point, the critics are sure to counter with the argument that nothing very different happens in many communities that have a Master Plan, as compared with those that do not. But to end there is to adopt a simplistic position on a complicated issue. It would be more useful to attempt to analyze the interrelated factors which, in fact, determine the Master Plan's effectiveness or lack thereof.

First, we must distinguish between communities that are as yet

undeveloped from those that have only a small proportion, if any, of their land still vacant. In undeveloped communities a properly thought out Master Plan which truly reflects current community goals has generally determined the nature and content of the Zoning Ordinance and, through it, the nature and intensity of development of the land. In such a context, the capital web laid down in the Master Plan, if properly related to future development and if realistically geared to the probable availability of resources, is most likely to significantly influence future events. In fact, pursuant to a recent New York State court decision,<sup>3</sup> communities can relate development timing controls to the existing or prospective availability of utilities and community facilities, *as set forth in the Master Plan*.

In addition, the very existence of the plan, as well as the thorough understanding of the interrelationship of the various discrete aspects of development which it assists local people to achieve, can be most helpful to the community in its negotiations with higher levels of government regarding highway alignments and similar matters, in defending, in court, attacks on its zoning policies, and in withstanding speculative pressures in general. It is true that the Master Plan, and the resulting zoning ordinance, are sometimes misused, but recognition of this simply argues against misuse rather than against the instrument itself.

Any purposeful discussion of the usefulness of the Master Plan to an essentially built-up community must begin with agreement on the following basic propositions:

1. There is an incontestable relationship between the intensity of development and its impact on streets and other public facilities. The ability of the circulation and other facility systems to absorb such impact is totally a function of their capacity to adjust to the increased load. If their capacity is exceeded, the quality of the services they provide drops, and this, in turn, affects the competitive position of the community as against other locations in the same general vicinity. Forced expansion of facilities (such as street widenings or the opening up of new streets) in built-up areas are both enormously expensive and socially disruptive.
2. There is an equally incontestable relationship between the quality, and thus the ultimate environmental stability, of residential neighborhoods, as well as commercial, and even industrial, districts, and the admixtures of uses permitted to locate within or around them. Also, the quality of the basic natural resources (air, water, open space) which are available to the residents is directly affected by the extent, location, and nature of development.

3. It is also axiomatic that any community, even though it may be fully, or nearly fully, built-up, is constantly evolving, and that it will be quite different in the future from what it is today. The pace of change in an isolated rural community differs from that in a community at or near the heart of a growing metropolitan area—but whether a community grows or declines, one thing that is certain is that it changes.
4. Based on what has happened in communities, large and small, which have evolved without the benefit of rational guidance of growth or proper evaluation of the factors which cause their decline, it can be confidently asserted that a haphazard course leads ultimately to pernicious consequences, and that such a course can only be avoided through the exercise of the type of rational control or anticipatory adjustment to conditions which are considered inevitable, which is exemplified by the Master Plan.
5. The fact that some communities that had a Master Plan may have developed no better than some that did not may only mean that their Master Plans were either improperly conceived or that they were improperly used.

If the above premises are granted, it would appear that rather than advocating that the Master Plan be eliminated in favor of allowing events to run their natural course, what should concern us is how it can be improved and strengthened so as to enable it to better fulfill its intended function.

### **Characteristics of a Master Plan**

Let us now consider the essential nature of the Master Plan and its intended purpose. As Louis Halle wrote of the statesman,<sup>4</sup> the political leader whom the planner ultimately serves, lives constantly close to chaos. He is beset by unforeseen problems at every turn. These problems are so critical that they inevitably seem to him decisive at the time, and so they become his entire preoccupation. His job, in effect, becomes a “management of chaos by rapid improvisation.” Part of the planner’s job is to help in the solution of such problems, but in part, his job is to conceive a framework within which these day-to-day decisions can ultimately flow together into a pattern which will protect and promote the public health, safety, and welfare. The planner is expected to be the man who, as Walter Lippman once expressed it, “can at times see through the transient and the complicated to the simple and the certain . . . [to see] the necessary amidst confusion and insignificance, and, by the light which it furnishes, to see more clearly how to act with purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

The planner's business is direction. He is like

the navigator of a ship who does not himself take the wheel, but makes the calculations on which the actions of the man at the wheel can be addressed, as opportunity serves, to a purpose beyond the immediate moment. If the sea is chaotic, the man at the wheel will have to be pre-occupied with every rolling wave that threatens the ship, and will have to act quickly either to evade or meet it, even though this means acting with apparent inconsistency, turning first in one direction, then in another. But these waves are not the navigator's business and he will only confuse himself and the helmsman if he tried to make them his business. His business is to see beyond the "transient and the complicated," and to make known what he sees, so that the ship can in the long run realize a purpose beyond that of survival in the present, so that it can have direction.<sup>6</sup>

Does this mean that the Master Plan should be developed with both eyes fixed on some never-never utopian land that never was and never will be? Nothing could be farther from what it should, in fact, be like. The planner's very immersion in at least understanding and trying to help political leaders solve their immediate problems should preclude him from transcending that which is realistically possible, given reasonable assumptions regarding availability of resources, and a thorough grounding in local attitudes and aspirations. Nor should the articulation of the plan be taken to mean that its provisions and recommendations will, in fact, be realized as stated and shown on the map. It must be viewed as that "flexible" document which planning theory always considered it to be, capable of changing under the impact of changed local objectives, availability of new information, fluctuations in available resources or statutory powers, new projects generated by higher levels of government, and new technology.

This point needs to be stressed, again and again. The "flexibility" of a plan does not mean that it is drawn on a rubber sheet, capable of expansion or contraction, at will. It means that the plan is capable of being modified. And this leads us into a consideration of how the plan is used, and by whom.

### The Master Plan in Practice

Normally, once a Master Plan is developed, it is considered a finished thing. It is hung on the wall, bound in a book, enshrined in the public library. But the Master Plan cannot be any more finished than the developmental process of the community which it is supposed to serve. It could be deemed to be completed only if every fact, every assumption, and every aspect of its underlying development goals were 100 per cent accurate when first set down—and if all of these remained accurate and relevant in their initial form into the indefinite future. Neither of these conditions can possibly be satisfied: the passage of time invalidates most

planning assumptions, and evolving technology, level of affluence, migration patterns, and social outlook of citizens invalidates most developmental objectives. Therefore, continuous updating of the Master Plan is all important to assure its continued meaning and usefulness.

The process of preparation, updating, and especially adoption, of the Master Plan has two dimensions: first, by whom; and second, how and how well. Today, in most jurisdictions throughout the country, the Master Plan is prepared and, if it is adopted at all, it is adopted by the planning board. Under the circumstances, it is not reasonable to expect that it will actually guide the governing body in all actions affecting physical development. In theory, the members of the local governing body, who are ultimately responsible for all developmental decisions, may be totally ignorant of the content, or even of the very existence, of the Master Plan. It would be totally unreasonable to expect them to voluntarily accept any limitation of their statutory freedom of action which the Master Plan may seek to impose. Regardless of who is responsible for its preparation, if the Master Plan is to become a mandatory guide with respect to all decisions affecting future development, it is absolutely essential that it be officially adopted, not by the planning board, but by the governing body.

Adoption by the governing body would not preclude future changes. What it would do, however, is require the governing body to hold public hearings and demonstrate to the satisfaction of its constituents, and, ultimately, possibly that of the courts, that the contemplated change would serve the public interest. Unlike the present situation, where local governing bodies provide ad hoc justification for their actions based on the narrowest possible immediate considerations, the debate surrounding the process of change in the context of an officially adopted Master Plan would, of necessity, range over the entire policy base underlying the plan. This, in itself, would invest the Master Plan with the kind of meaning which it presently totally lacks. And having such a meaning, the quality, relevance, and up-to-dateness of the plan would become important enough to the governing body to justify a sufficient allocation of resources both for its initial preparation and for the proper unfolding of the continuing planning process.

A concrete illustration of what is meant is furnished by a recent case of zoning litigation in the State of New Jersey. The rural, but urbanizing, township in that case had recently prepared a Master Plan which set aside certain lands with access to major transportation routes for concentrations of major nonresidential uses which, while productive of high tax revenues, also generate heavy traffic. One of the purposes of providing for a large number of high taxpayers was to enable the township to maintain another portion of its territory which was served by minor, twisting, narrow roads,

and was not served by any utilities, as a very low-density, rural residential environment.

No sooner was the ink dry on the plan that a major corporation applied for the rezoning of an estate in the proposed rural area on which it held an option to purchase, subject to rezoning. The application was granted, and was promptly challenged by the people living in the area affected. On the stand, the expert witness for the plaintiffs tried to suggest that the Master Plan should weigh heavily in the Court's decision. The plan was prepared with the aid of local and Federal public funds. Dozens of citizens had been asked to expend a great deal of time serving on various advisory committees for over two years. And the adoption of the plan by the planning board, following well-advertised and well-attended public meetings and hearings, had given the townspeople a sense of security in the explicitness of the policies which would henceforth guide the development of the township. The expert planner recognized that a planning board action could not bind the governing body; on the other hand, however, he pointed out that the funds for the preparation of the plan had been authorized and allocated *by the governing body*, and that the only justification for such action on their part was at least a tacit admission that the product of the planning board's labors, modified, if necessary, would ultimately be accepted as a guide. The planner suggested that, under the circumstances, the governing body should at least be asked to explain how the proposed change would fit in with the basic policies of the plan; how it would affect the chances of realization of the plan for other parts of the community that would be affected, directly or indirectly, by the presence of the new, corporate headquarters in the proposed location; and if necessary, to explicitly state, prior to granting the rezoning, which of the plan's policies were being specifically abandoned or changed as a result of its action.

Instead, the only evidence which the governing body offered was that the permitted use would produce high taxes and that the local roads could be widened to at least partially accommodate the resulting traffic. Unfortunately, the court's decision totally ignored the Master Plan. In essence, the court resorted to that time-tested basis for judicial retreat from the necessity to delve into the substance of the case—namely, that in the absence of clear evidence of arbitrariness, the decision of the legislative body would be allowed to stand.

In the face of this total disdain of the Master Plan on the part of both, the governing body and the courts, it is no wonder that, customarily, its provisions make little, if any, dent in the actual unfolding of events. Adoption of the plan by the planning board is irrelevant; its adoption by the governing body must be made mandatory by statute. In fact, the law

should go further and specifically *require* governing bodies to adopt a Master Plan within a reasonable time. In addition, the law should conditions both, the *initial adoption* and the *continued validity*, of all land use controls on the prior existence of an officially adopted plan.

The effectiveness of the Master Plan depends entirely upon whether or not it is actually used in the development process. A plan adopted by the governing body as an expression of its legislative policy regarding the community's future should, therefore, be completely binding on all actions of all agencies of the municipality. In other words, *whatever action is ever taken should always have to be in accordance with the Master Plan*. If the Master Plan is found to interfere with something which would further the public interest, it should be amended formally, and with full opportunity for all those affected to participate in the debate, and the particular action should be authorized only in accordance with the amended plan.

### Problems Encountered

An unfortunate diversionary tactic which creeps into all discussions regarding the possible desirability of a statutory Master Plan requirement is that there are many static or declining rural communities where the preparation of a Master Plan would be of only academic significance. For some reason, the assumption implicit in such criticism is that, of necessity, a Master Plan must chart growth regardless of how unreasonable it might be to expect any growth to occur. This, of course, is not so. A Master Plan starts with a realistic assessment of the existing situation and of the trends affecting the community. If the community is static or declining, then the exercise involved in the preparation of the Master Plan may identify the reasons for its condition and may address itself to the things which need to be done if the future of the community is to be guided in a desirable direction. A well conceived plan would also identify the need for outside assistance, if any, for the reversal of trends and would investigate the availability of necessary resources. If such resources prove to be unattainable, then the analysis underlying the plan could be used by higher levels of government to develop anticipatory measures designed to enable the community to adjust to its impending decline with a minimum of social disruption and human suffering.

It is also important to realize that many of the problems with which we are struggling today are the result of sudden changes in land use trends in communities which were totally unprepared for them. This is especially true of smaller and less urban communities. With the proliferation of cheap air transportation, it would seem that few, if any such communities are immune from sudden major land use shifts in the form of resort



communities, new towns, major industrial plants, and the like. Witness what happened to Lake Tahoe in California and to the drastic measures being taken to save the Adirondacks in New York State. Witness also the unbridled excesses being perpetrated by land development companies in almost all climatically favored parts of the country. Not to require adoption of plans by *all* local governments in deference to the possible wishes of *some* communities in which it may be inappropriate to do so, is literally allowing the tail to wag the dog. It would appear that the opposite would be a much more useful approach.

In summary, it is suggested that the preparation of a Master Plan would benefit all communities, that the plan need not be any more complicated than the community which it is intended to serve, and that the updating of a plan in a community which is not subject to change could consist simply of a confirmation of its existing plan. No make-work need, of necessity, be involved in either the preparation of a plan or its updating.

### **Financing the Planning Process**

The existence of a meaningful, officially adopted Master Plan is bound to have a major influence on the thought patterns of all those concerned with the community's future development. The plan constitutes the conceptual model of the community's future and contrasts it with the existential realities which the planners' clients, the local legislators and chief executives, have to encounter from day to day. If the plan shows the community's school, or open space, or circulation system to be inadequate, if this is reiterated every time the plan is reviewed at public hearings over a long period, and if its remedial provisions are given standing by being part of an officially adopted plan, then the sense of priorities on the local level may well gradually shift so as to make local expenditures for their realization more politically feasible. Also, the constant pressure on higher levels of government for assistance toward the realization of broadly agreed-to local goals, which heightened local awareness of deficiencies is bound to generate, may substantially affect the availability of outside funds.

Many Master Plans have been attacked for being "unrealistic" even when all they tried to do is establish minimum acceptable environmental standards. But is it unrealistic for a Plan to show the need, in 1972, for the replacement of all schools built in the 19th Century? Or for the elimination of all those dwellings which are still standing but which are unfit for human habitation? Or for the correction of hazards to life and limb along 19th Century street systems as they struggle to accommodate the current enormous traffic loads? Or the elimination of causes of environmental degradation? Does not the problem rather lie with our

chronic unwillingness to allocate adequate resources toward the solution of these very real problems? Does not the difficulty lie, not in the identification of what needs to be done, but in our national, state, and local priorities which find billions of dollars for so many purposes which are so much less related to the public welfare? And, if this is so, would not the aggregate of all officially adopted plans of all municipalities throughout the nation, with the pressure of an educated electorate behind them, perhaps weigh heavily in the direction of a change in public attitudes to these frequently life or death matters?

Inadequate funding of the continuing planning process has also been at the root of the ineffectiveness of Master Plans—at least, of those which were competently prepared to begin with. The money invested in the preparation of plans has been wasted so often in the past not because the plans themselves proved to be useless, but because they were not given a chance to work. The planning function should only begin with the formulation of a Master Plan; it can never end so long as the community itself remains alive. To be effective, planning must become a household word in the community, and the goals of planning and those of the community must become identical. The Master Plan must be constantly publicized—in newspapers, on television, at meetings all over town. Wherever possible, it should be used as instructional material in social studies courses in high school. It should be broken down into its components and distributed to all civic organizations and neighborhood groups. The planners should never tire of speaking before whoever asks them to speak.

Realization of the plan's objectives, particularly in older cities, is increasingly dependent upon the availability of Federal and state funds. The planner must be always ready to take advantage of new legislation and fresh appropriations while they last. He must be equipped to prepare and file applications, submit necessary documentation, and, generally, make a nuisance of himself where it counts—i.e., where the money is. To be fully effective, the planner must develop close working relations with the staffs of his Congressman, his Senators, and all relevant state and Federal agencies. In addition, he must develop close working relations with his own chief executive and legislative body. Where the volume of activity does not require the appointment and maintenance of a full permanent staff, the same types of services must be secured by employing outside professional consultants.

The point of all this is that good, effective planning cannot just happen—it has to be painstakingly built, stone by stone. The Master Plan will never solve the community's problems in its original state, but it can do much toward their solution as it evolves in the context of a meaningful

planning process. And the planning process can unfold ever so much more meaningfully if there is a Master Plan than if there is not. A concrete illustration of this principle is furnished by the not very unique evolution of a specific plan drawn for Peekskill, a small city at the northern limits of New York City's commuting belt, which is described in detail in the Appendix to this article.

### Social and Economic Considerations

This is not the place for an expansive discussion of the extent to which the Master Plan should or should not encompass social and economic goals and measures designed to achieve them. Suffice it to say that the philosophy underlying the argument presented in this article readily admits that, in the global scheme of things, "objectives like full employment and maximization of opportunities for underprivileged groups"<sup>7</sup> are more important than the precise location of a school or the amount of available open space. But agreement on this point does not mean that, in pursuing programs to increase employment or other social or economic opportunities, a community should abandon its concern with efficiency, environmental quality, and beauty. It simply means that the socio-economic framework within which land planning takes place and the socio-economic consequences of alternative forms of physical development must constitute *inputs* to the land development decision-making process. It also means that, to the maximum extent possible, land planning decisions should contribute to the realization of other community goals. Clearly, however, land planning decisions which will shape our total environment for generations to come and which will affect the land forever should not be subordinated to socio-economic objectives to which they are frequently only tangentially related, if at all. This is particularly so in view of the difficulty of designing plans for socio-economic objectives which is admitted even by those who advocate their supremacy.<sup>8</sup>

This approach generally also underlies the American Law Institute's recently completed draft Model Land Development Code. As the reporters comment, the recommended approach, i.e., that the Master Plan "should have a physical development nucleus but should require that specified economic and social data be taken into consideration in its preparation," does not preclude the local planning agency from engaging in planning for health services, welfare reform, or many other subjects not directly related to land development.<sup>9</sup> Far from being one of many alternative ways of addressing the problem of sound land development, this is the only one which can possibly result in sensible land development enabling legislation and land use controls.

## Regional Considerations

In these days of concern for the need for balance between localism and regional considerations, no discussion of the Master Plan's effectiveness would be complete without a look at its impact, if any, on our ability to achieve a rational and equitable metropolitan land use and population distribution. Cutting through the underbrush of confusion and imprecise wishful thinking which surrounds this subject, there appear to be two basic ways of approaching this problem. The first would be through the development and enactment of a regional land use plan, which would be binding on all communities in the region. The second would be by encouraging all communities to enact their own Master Plan, analyze the resulting pattern, and enact binding regional modifications only in those instances where the broad public interest is demonstrably hurt by the understandable lack of regional perspective in the local plans. Given the strong commitment to the principle of local home rule in most of the fifty states, the chances of achieving regional coordination through the method of adjusting local plans would seem to be greater than by attempting to push a regional approach from above through what appears to be an impenetrable wall of public opposition. In fact, the most promising approach is that middle-of-the-road compromise advocated in the American Law Institute draft Model Planning Enabling Act and embodied in the Senate version of the National Land Use Planning Act of 1972 and in the recently adopted Florida land use statute. The concept which it advances is that of state jurisdiction over areas whose future development is critical to the entire state and over projects of regional benefit. But even if this type of legislation were to be widely adopted, local governments would still be left with substantial jurisdiction, undoubtedly including that of determining the specific nature of development which they would permit within the framework of state-established criteria for the types of areas described above. Therefore, it would seem that the necessity for rational decision-making with the aid of an official Master Plan is not negated by recognition of the regional impact of local land use decisions.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, to summarize some of the main point of this paper, it should seem self-evident that the Master Plan is an essential preventative of haphazard development and its well known dire consequences. To be capable of guiding events, the Master Plan must be invested with meaning by making its adoption by the governing body mandatory, and by conditioning the validity of *all* local land use controls and public actions affecting land development on conformance with the plan. Ultimately, the

validity of Master Plans will depend upon the willingness of the country to address sufficient resources to the realization of the type of goals which they seek to achieve. Pending such a change in priorities, the answer lies definitely not in our ceasing to put forward the case for the achievement of reasonable standards; on the contrary, the best possible and ultimately most convincing means of bringing about the desired change is for us to continue to set forth our aspirations in the form of officially approved plans for the attainment of community objectives.

The existence of a meaningful Master Plan would thus create a dual world that would evolve continuously in both its aspects by being driven forward. The concepts of the plan would produce existential changes and these, in turn, would require conceptual revision. This dynamic process would place the community in a state of progressive transformation from its present condition toward an ever-changing, but ever improving, future condition, whose outline would be only dimly apparent in its current Master Plan.

To be capable of playing its intended role in that model of constructive tension between the conceptual and the existential the plan cannot be a utopian concoction. If it is to serve any practical ends at all, it cannot be ideal—it must, from the very beginning, be adapted to the existential scene. In developing such a plan and in guiding it through its subsequent metamorphoses, the planner must function as a statesman. To be able to function as such, he must be endowed with *vision*, which is the ability to see beyond the transient circumstances of the immediate present, and with the *discipline of responsibility*, which would prevent him from overlooking the limits set by the circumstances of the immediate present.

As Louise Halle remarked, “true statesmanship performs a mediating function. It performs that function in a zone of tension between a . . . conceptual order on the one hand, and, on the other, the existential circumstances that resist the imposition of that order.”<sup>10</sup> The planner must be conscious of the fact that leaders who are men of action, men whose overriding concern is with the practical problems of the immediate present, will do whatever the existential circumstances will require them to do to maintain their leadership, including sacrificing the logic of their conceptual world if that should prove necessary. In this they always tend to emulate Napoleon who was always ready to plunge into action first, and formulate afterward the conceptual rationalization with which to explain the course chosen. But the planner cannot simply accept the circumstances as they are. To do that would be tantamount to his being willing to embrace chaos. Equally, however, for the planner to insist on upholding an ideal order in contempt of those circumstances would be to evade the burden of helping to resolve our most basic dilemma by refusing to recognize that it exists. In short, it would be tantamount to being irrelevant.

## Appendix

In a recent book,<sup>11</sup> Howard S. Rowland wrote that

the roster of areas attempting to cope with poverty, blight, and social tensions would include almost every large and middle-sized American city. . . . None thus far has been totally successful. The best that can be said of any city is that it has made a start. . . . One city, Peekskill, New York (population 19,283), . . . too, has not succeeded and has only made a beginning. But unlike . . . other cities [it] has been able to attract, demand, and win massive support from Federal and state agencies and with these resources start a comprehensive attack on its problems: lack of housing, unemployment, racial antagonism, economic stagnation, transportation bottlenecks, and torpor in local government. . . .

Today a vibrant and forward looking city, Peekskill . . . in 1967 was a grim, impoverished waterfront town . . . In this city in which industry, population, and business had in the past steadily declined or departed, the massive changes now being wrought will eventually reach into every section of the city, affect every population group, the schools, municipal services, housing, recreation, commerce, industry, employment, roads and lighting.

The renaissance began in 1958 when, with the assistance of Federal aid under the Urban Planning Assistance Program (Section 701), the city retained the firm of Raymond & May Associates (now Raymond, Parish & Pine, Inc.) "to draw up a master plan for redeveloping the city." After completion of the plan, in 1960, and after a change in administration, almost nothing happened for eight years. The sole urban renewal project commenced by the administration previously in power barely reached the acquisition and demolition stage, with hardly a parcel sold for development. Within four years after another change in administration in 1968, however, things looked quite different. For instance:

1. *The 1960 Plan recommended that the city undertake two urban renewal projects, involving two marginal portions of its Central Business District and their immediate environs:*

One 26-acre project is in the final stages of execution. Some 300 fully taxpaying upper middle-income apartments have been completed and are occupied, as are a few small stores and a bank. A fire house and small public park are in place, and an inner city shopping center containing some 60,000 square feet of floor space, which is under construction on a three-acre site, will be finished before the end of the year. Another three-acre Central Business District site is under contract for sale to a department store developer.

The second project, covering 133 acres under the Neighborhood Development Program, has just received its second year funding. The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) granted \$2 million to Peekskill the first year and was so satisfied by its program

achievements that, instead of cutting the City's second year appropriation, it awarded it a bonus of almost a quarter of a million dollars for the actions now underway.

Additional blighted areas identified in the Plan (covering 200 acres and over 1,000 dwelling units) were approved for a \$2.5 million Federally-aided code enforcement and rehabilitation program. This area contains 20 per cent of the City's entire housing supply and more than 50 per cent of all of its substandard units.

2. *A new Zoning Ordinance and a new set of Subdivision Regulations, both of which were developed as part of the Plan, have been adopted and have since guided all new development throughout the City.*
3. *The Plan called for purchase and redevelopment for recreation purposes of one-third of the City's Hudson River waterfront.*

The City has purchased one mile, or a full two-thirds, of its waterfront, has installed a launch site for small boats and has filed with HUD an application for an ambitious new-town-in-town, water oriented residential and marina recreational-park community.

4. *The Plan called for six new neighborhood park-playgrounds, on new sites, or on expanded elementary school property.*

Three of the six sites have been acquired: one is completed, one is under construction, and one is in the final design stage. A fourth site, adjacent to the elementary school which it was to have served, has been lost to residential development, but only following a Plan amendment whereby it was replaced by a nearby neighborhood park, which has since been acquired and fully developed. Two other locations which were proposed in the Plan to meet long-range future needs still remain to be acquired.

5. *The Plan provided for future development of garden and high-rise apartments on seven large vacant sites of ten to seventy-five acres, each.*

Five of these sites have been fully developed with garden apartments or high-rise development, for a total of approximately 1,000 dwelling units, to house a population increase of approximately 12 per cent of the city's total population at the time the plan was developed. The two sites which have not yet been developed still remain to be rezoned for the purpose; this, too, is in accordance with the Plan's recommendation that such action await necessary utility and highway improvements, some of which are now underway. Over 1,400 luxury apartments are now under final design for these two sites. When completed, all these apartments will generate over \$2 million per year in taxes.

6. *The Plan called for numerous highway improvements by local, county, and state agencies.*

All of the recommended Central Business District highway improvements are presently under construction. Others are planned for reconstruction under the pending Neighborhood Development Program. The State Department of Transportation is all set to improve one-half the total length of the main arterial highway through the City, and to realign and rebuild two miles of a State Parkway which runs through the City—all as recommended in the Plan.

7. *The Central Business District Plan called for eight new parking lots and improvements to three existing parking lots.*

Two of the three previously existing lots have been expanded at ground level, according to the Plan, but due to a change in policy, they will be improved with parking structures scheduled for completion next year. Three of the remaining six proposed new areas are being acquired and are under preliminary design for on-grade parking. No action was taken on three sites, mainly because the intensification of use of some of the others through use of parking structures makes them no longer necessary.

8. *The Plan called for revitalization of the Central Business District by the addition of 200,000 square feet of retail floor space by 1975. This amount was based on projected population growth and resulting increase in the City's trade area purchasing power.*

The entire projected need for 140,000 square feet of space by 1970 was absorbed by an "in-city," but peripheral shopping center located at the confluence of two main state highways. The additional 60,000 square feet of space anticipated as being justified by 1975 are presently under construction as planned, within the Central Business District urban renewal project. An additional 65,000 square feet of office and retail space will be under construction by the end of October along with one of the previously mentioned garages (which will be topped by a 170-unit senior citizen middle-income apartment development).

That nothing happened for ten years was obviously not due to any lack of validity of the Plan's recommendations. Clearly, the first prerequisite for success is a commitment by the city administration to community improvement, a commitment which, if it is to mean anything, must include a willingness to establish an adequately scaled continuing planning process. The new administration was sufficiently interested in the improvement of the community to properly staff the planning function, and to give the



city's new Development Coordinator (who is also the City Planner) all of the necessary staff and consultant support to enable the program to move purposefully and fast. It might be added that, because Peekskill did what it did, it was able to secure \$25 million in Federal grants and a similar amount in private investments. This total amount is equal to the City's entire assessed valuation in 1970. The Federal grants enabled it to also finance most of its continuing planning function at no cost to its taxpayers.

The above experience is also very instructive from another point of view. Stung by criticism of excessive bureaucratic supervision of the expenditure of Federal funds in cities, the Nixon Administration and many members of both houses of Congress have indicated a clear preference for community development block grants disbursed on the basis of an allocation formula with minimum supervision and with loose accountability. It is interesting to speculate whether the administration in power in the City of Peekskill between 1960 and 1968 would have accomplished more for its community with unrestricted funds than it was able to accomplish through use of the categorical grants. After all, the current administration accomplished what it did with the aid of the same grants that were available to the one now happily out of office. It may be, therefore, that the nation will experience many disappointments so long as it seeks salvation through shedding of responsibility rather than through adequate funding of substantive programs and careful attention to the accountability of the urban rebuilding and development process.

## REFERENCES

1. As used in this report, the term *Master Plan* is synonymous with the term *Land Development Plan* as that term is used in Tentative Draft No. 2 of *A Model Land Development Code*, The American Law Institute, April 1970.
2. Norman Williams, *Planning Law and Democratic Living*, 20 *Law & Contemporary Problems*, 317 (1955).
3. *Golden vs. Planning Board of Town of Ramapo*, N.Y.S. 2d (1971).
4. The conceptual framework of this paper is much indebted to Louis Halle's general discussion of the problems faced by statesmen in *The Society of Man*, Dell Publishing Co., N.Y., 1969. It appears that whether statesmen are concerned with making sense in foreign affairs or urban affairs, their problems are the same. Fortunately, they haven't given up in either field—and hopefully, they never will.
5. Quoted in Louis Halle, *op. cit.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. William L. C. Wheaton, *Operations Research for Metropolitan Planning*, 29, *J. Amer. Inst. Planners* 250 (1963).
8. *Ibid.*
9. *A Model Land Development Code*, The American Law Institute, Tentative Draft No. 2, April 24, 1970, pp. 86-87.

10. Louis Halle, *op. cit.*
11. *The New York Times Guide to Federal Aid for Cities and Towns*, Howard S. Rowland, Quadrangle Books, New York, 1971, pp. 1-23.