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ADVOCACY PLANNING IN CLEVELAND

Lecture by Norman Krumholz, Director Cleveland City Planning Commission for the Department of City and Regional Planning - University of California, Berkeley, California, October 10, 1973

Four years ago I joined the administration of Mayor Carl B. Stokes as Planning Director of the City of Cleveland. It is not clear that Mayor Stokes had any idea of what to do with me at first, but the body to which I am officially responsible -- the City Planning Commission -- had some very clear ideas on high-priority work assignments. One Commission member (a planning professor interested in land use control) wanted a completely new zoning ordinance; another (a downtown businessman) wanted a downtown-revitalization study; a third (a banker) thought that a study aimed at straightening out the winding Cuyahoga River would help straighten out the city's problems as well. For my part, my intent was to gather up all the resources at my command and plunge forward with a new long range land use plan.

Luckily, a few newly-hired staff members and I paused to consider the City of Cleveland and its people instead of the guidelines of current American planning practice. We saw an old industrial city, with a sharply declining population and diminishing shares of the regional economy in every sector. We saw an old housing stock, deteriorating quickly, with the phenomena of disinvestment and abandonment already well-established. We saw a blue-collar population, white and black, without significant percentages of the rich and the

middle-class most of whom had long-since departed for the suburbs. We saw a population with a 1970 median family income of \$9,100 where about 1/3 of all households had annual incomes of less than \$5,000, where 79,000 households lacked the mobility provided by an automobile, where crime and racial hostility and segregation were high and apparently rising.

It became obvious to us that development of a comprehensive long range land use plan - even a brand-new zoning ordinance - would be irrelevant if not actually counter-productive. The elements of the urban crisis in Cleveland and in other older cities of this nation have little to do with land use. They have to do with poverty, racism, social alienation, crime, bad housing and they cannot be directly, nor meaningfully, attacked with the city planner's traditional bag of tools.

We could have ignored or suppressed this realization and proceeded toward an updated version of Cleveland's 1949 Land Use Plan. (It is worth noting here that few people in city government understand just what it is that city planners are supposed to do, and the confusion seems to extend to many members of the planning profession. Once we planners satisfy the narrow responsibilities mandated by our City Charter, we have great freedom to decide our own roles, responsibilities and work programs.) It was our choice, then, to by-pass the land use plan and to begin instead our first halting steps toward a new vision for Cleveland, new directions for our institutions, and a role for the

Cleveland Planning Commission worthy of our efforts and resources.

The vision, or our over-riding goal, is simple. It can be stated in a short series of logical steps which focus on individual freedom and institutional responsibility:

- Individuals choose their own goals and means to pursue those goals.
- Institutions are established to serve individuals in their pursuit of their own goals. In the process institutions, themselves, establish goals -- some of which must be self-serving to assure their survival.
- Institutional goals which are self-serving, however, must be clearly secondary to those which further the pursuit of individual goals.
- Both individuals and institutions pursue their respective goals through decision and action. Decisions to act must be made from among those choices of action which the individual or institution perceives.
- Individuals are better off with more choices in any decision.
- Institutions serve individual goals most when they provide wider choices in decisions made by individuals.
- The primary goal of institutions must be to provide wider choices to individuals through institutional decisions and actions.

-- In a context of limited resources, institutions should give first and priority attention to the task of promoting wider choices for those individuals and groups who have few, if any choices.

In short, the advice, information and recommendations offered by the Cleveland City Planning Commission would be primarily directed toward the accomplishment of this single, simply-stated goal:

-- Simple equity requires that locally-responsible government institutions - with limited powers and resources - should give first and priority attention to the goal of promoting wider choices (more alternatives and opportunities) for those individuals and groups in the City of Cleveland who have few, if any choices.

We are aware that this goal places us in a clear advocate position in favor of those who have few, or no, choices. We understand that its successful pursuit will require no less than a fundamental redistribution of income and power in our society. But we are convinced that such a goal is not utopian, it is not radical, nor is it altruistic or benevolent. It is a familiar goal, rooted in the egalitarian ideals of our birth and growth as a nation. It is ultimately, a just goal; one that seeks a society where equity is at least as important as efficiency.

I hope in these introductory remarks I have established the concern for "advocacy" or "equity" which guides the day-to-day operation and work program of the Cleveland City Planning Commission. I would

now to relate two examples which will illustrate some of the issues in which we have been involved and give you a feeling for our general approach and operating style. Later, I will try to elicit some principles from these examples.

One of the first issues we chose to address was Cleveland's housing problem. There was general agreement among the Mayor, Council and most city officials as to what the problem was: there was a scarcity of low- and moderate-income housing in the city. The conventional remedy was build more subsidized housing wherever such construction was politically feasible.

My staff was not convinced. If conventional wisdom was correct, why were rents in Cleveland so low and why were several neighborhoods in Cleveland showing clear signs of widespread abandonment? We decided to undertake a research effort aimed at answering three basic questions:

- 1) what was the nature of the housing problem in Cleveland?
- 2) what had been the nature and effectiveness of public response to the problem?
- 3) what changes in public programs and policies would be needed to achieve a more effective response to the problem?

Our detailed analysis was recently completed and published as the Cleveland Housing Papers. I believe it stands as one of the finest series of analytical papers on housing ever done by a city planning agency.

The analyses argue forcefully that the nature of the housing problem has changed dramatically in Cleveland. Conventional wisdom is incorrect. No longer is there a scarcity of low income housing units. Because of sweeping population shifts and generally low income, a surplus of low income units - many of them substandard - has been created.

We found that about 2,000 vacant and vandalized housing units existed in Cleveland, and that the rate of residential abandonment was about three dwelling units a day. We found that, because of low income, large numbers of Cleveland households simply could not afford standard housing; that owners were not getting enough revenues to be able to maintain their buildings properly. We became increasingly convinced that the traditional emphasis of city housing policy on new construction was unserviceable. We came to believe that the attention of City officials should be focused on saving the existing stock from the growing threat of deterioration and abandonment.

On the basis of our analysis, we recommended a series of programs including: a strong plea for a new Federal Housing Allowance Program paid directly to qualified families for the rental of standard housing; improved code enforcement in the still-salvagable residential areas of Cleveland; interim uses for abandoned lots, a tightening-up of condemnation and tax-delinquency procedures; and \$1.5 million for demolition of vacant-vandalized structures.

We presented these findings and recommendations to the City Planning Commission - and got a good deal of local publicity. We briefed Mayor Perk and other key city officials, and lobbied with essential support from our friends in the press for the necessary demolition funds. We asked for - and received - the Mayor's support to lobby for a Housing Allowance Program within the HUD Washington bureacracy which we did with some vigor. We contacted all of our area's U. S. Representatives and both Ohio Senators for their support for housing allowances. We wrote an article describing our study and its findings and had it published in the ASPO magazine. We sent copies of the Cleveland Housing Papers to various academicians whom we hoped would support our argument and help us lobby with the HUD bureaucracy and their own area Congressmen. And we have armed the Mayor with testimony to present before Congressional Committees in support of housing allowances when the new housing bill is introduced.

The City Adminstration and City Council almost immediately gave us the full \$1½ million we requested for demolition of vacant, vandalized buildings out of Cleveland's first general revenue-sharing check. The prognosis for the other parts of the program package is reasonably hopeful. A Housing Allowance Program apparently will be included in the new federal housing bill, and a good deal of work has already taken place locally on code enforcement and condemnation reform within the City.

Example number two deals with transportation. A few weeks after I arrived in Cleveland, Mayor Stokes asked me to serve as his representative on a City transit committee established to prepare a program and grant application for federal funds in support of the Cleveland Transit System. CTS, which is owned by the City, was (and is) suffering from the familiar ridership and revenue shortages that characterize public transit everywhere. A way had to be found simply to keep the system operating. Beyond that, no other objective was discussed in any clear way.

The Committee completed its work quickly and submitted its proposal to the Department of Transportation. The people at DOT, anxious to assure comprehensiveness, told us to go away until we had a joint City-County proposal. We returned to our labors with some County officials added to our roster and, lo, just such a joint proposal emerged which we then brought back to DOT for approval.

But the federal agency still was not satisfied that the joint City-County proposal was sufficiently comprehensive; after all parts of the larger region were urbanizing and transportation proposals would have an impact there. So the joint City-County committee was reconstituted as a special subcommittee of our seven-county regional agency; the scope of the study was broadened from one to five counties and the study committee itself was broadened to 21 members of which

the outlying four counties appoint one representative each, the business community appoints two, the Cuyahoga County Commissioners appoint three, and the City of Cleveland appoints three.

The new committee and study area were now sufficiently "comprehensive" to satisfy federal requirements. But somehow the goal of the committee was no longer simply to keep CTS running, but to extend rapid lines, provide an attractive alternative to the automobile, unify and coordinate the 21 public and private transit systems in the region, build a downtown distribution system and to transfer CTS to some sort of regional agency which could use general tax funds to supplement the farebox. Once all this was accomplished, the system's survival would be assured, and everybody would be happy. Or would they?

Interestingly, my staff and I thought "not necessarily." For while these reorganizations were taking place, our first transportation study entitled "Transportation and Poverty" was published. Let me quote briefly from its findings:

"In the course of opting for an automotive civilization, we have provided unprecedented mobility for those who can take full advantage of it. But in the process, the national majority has chosen to ignore completely the problems this civilization creates for those who cannot drive or lack regular access to a car. As any resident of Cleveland can testify, if he is too

young, too poor, too ill or too old to drive, there are fewer and fewer places he can reach by conventional transit. This is partly the result of the increased scatteration of new developments taking place at low densities impossible to achieve without the highway and the car, and partly because of service cuts by public transit brought on by decreasing ridership and revenues.

It is not the purpose of this paper to argue for an end to highway investment, but to attempt to modify and redress the impact of present regressive transportation policies on the poor, the elderly, the very young and the disadvantaged.

This group is substantial, indeed. In 1956, 32% of all households, that is, about 79,000 households, in the City of Cleveland did not own cars. Of the estimated 46,000 families with annual incomes under \$5,000, 46% owned no car. Of all households headed by persons over 65, 48% or approximately 24,000 households owned no car.

In keeping with the Cleveland City Planning Commission's goal of improving choices for people who have few, it is morally imperative that this transit-dependent group be the prime beneficiaries of changes in transportation policies. The overriding goal of transportation policy in the City of Cleve-

land must be to ensure a decent level of mobility to those prevented by poverty or by a combination of modest income and physical disability (including old age) from moving freely about the metropolitan area."

Now, since improving the mobility of the transit dependent population is the Cleveland City Planning Commission's prime objective, does the transfer of CTS to a regional agency automatically or necessarily serve that end? Does a downtown subway or suburban rapid extensions confer any benefits on the transit-dependent? Would improved funding be used to relieve the restricted mobility of the transit-dependent or to provide more transportation choices to the suburban middle class? Would the 5-County Transit Committee with its business and regional political constituency, be overly concerned with the needs of the transit-dependent population which is largely confined to the City of Cleveland?

I would like to answer these questions definitively, but after almost four years we are still in the process of finding out. Over that period my staff, myself and the Planning Commission have been continually stressing the need for improved mobility for the transit-dependent population as urgently as we can. If we were the ultimate decision-makers, the issue would be resolved; the politicians and local institutions with a stake in the issue, however, have been ambiguous in their support. What have we as planners done to assure proper attention to the issue at decision-time?

As a planning professional, I have lobbied for emphasis on the needs of the transit-dependent via briefings with the Mayor, Council members and other local political figures. I have submitted papers at AIP-DOT sponsored conferences, at AIP and ASPO annual conferences and at two AIP Biennial Policy Conferences. I have been in constant touch with my opposit numbers in the DOT bureaucracy. Key members of my staff have engaged in similar efforts.

The Cleveland City Planning Commission has been supportive in passing numerous resolutions stating and re-stating its concern for the transit-dependent, and setting conditions clearly beneficial to this group in any future transfer of CTS to a regional agency.

In my role as member of the Five-County Transit Committee, its Consultant Screening Committee, its Executive Committee and on the Board of the seven-county regional planning agency, I have pressed for proper recognition to this issue.

To some extent, our efforts have been successful. In its goal statement the 5-County Transit Study has recognized the improved mobility of the transit-dependent as its highest priority. After much barganing and committee in-fighting, we have convinced the 5-County Study to select our candidates for prime contractor, for sub-contractor for the vital transit-dependent element of the plan and for project manager. We have also fought for and won adequate funding for the transit-dependent element of the study. We supported

all these consulting organizations and individuals because they indicated an empathy for our own policy focus on the needs of the transit-dependent as opposed to other firms and individuals offering what we considered only the standard civil engineering approach to the study.

Yet, after all this effort, I am not overly-confident that our view will prevail in the final resolution of the issue. The seven-county planning agency has announced, as its first transit proposal, support for a \$10 million 1½-mile extension of the existing Shaker Rapid from fashionable - and rich - Shaker Heights to fashionable - and richer - Pepper Pike. And the 5-County Transit Study has presented as its preliminary package, a series of high-priced proposals that under our analysis, appear to confer massive benefits to the rich and middle-class in the region and only marginal benefits to the transit-dependent population in the City.

But the game is not over. As professional long-term players, representing an important City agency, our point-of-view must be accommodated. If the business community is to get its downtown subway and the suburban politicians their rapid extensions, we are determined to get adequate attention to our transit-dependent clients. If we do not, we have made clear our intent to publicly (and loudly) defect and disavow the study, an action that could jeopardize the entire study's chances for success. By continuing to try to influence

the study, the Mayor and other key decision-makers, we may still exert enough leverage to win out after all.

These two examples are representative of many of the issues in which we are involved. What is it that they represent? What do they suggest about the operations of the Cleveland City Planning Commission which might be of some value to other planning agencies and the planning profession in general?

First, we planners have been too timid - and that criticism is directed most specifically at directors of planning agencies. Based on our experience in Cleveland, advocacy or equity planners can survive. It seems clear that planning agencies which cast before themselves a vision of a just society as their overriding goal, and then work seriously toward that goal, can endure and even prosper. Surely risks exist, but it seems to us that they have been overdramatized. As a profession we have been seriously compromised by considerations of job-security, political safety, and the limitations of contemporary American practice.

The housing and mass transit examples are only two areas of our program. In all our work in Cleveland we have tried to be responsible to the goal of equity. We have asked that essential question: "Who gets - who pays" in our analysis of all proposals coming before us.

And when proposals have led away from greater equity, we have designed and attempted to sell alternatives under which the clear benefits would go to those most in need.

In four years, under two Mayors who could not be more dissimilar -- a Black, liberal Democrat, and a White, conservative Republican -- our agency has steadily acquired greater influence, prestige and success.

An essential ingredient in that success has been professional competence. Our program analyses and recommendations are informed both by our point of view and by our technical expertise. They are not based on liberal rhetoric or our own "feel" of an issue. Political decision-makers are uninterested in hearing more of the standard rhetoric from the left; and their political "feel" is lots better than ours.

The presentation of policies and programs to the Mayor, Councilmen and other key political and business figures requires staff with basic, critical skills and abilities. Ability to deal with voluminous statistical information, familiarity with both public and private financial practices and techniques; an understanding of basic economic precepts, a working knowledge of the law and an appreciation of the rules of bureaucracies are crucial characteristics of staff engaged in this work. More often than not, the successful advocacy of a

desirable program or legislative change will rely entirely upon the quality of staff work involved. Certainly the only legitimate power the Commission can count on in these matters is the power of information, analysis and insight they bring to bear. If you are interested in affecting outcomes, then, expertise is essential.

Second, the Cleveland City Planning Commission is "activist" in the sense that it is not willing to play either the role of rubber stamp or civic "watchdog", but actively develops policies and programs and attempts to implement them. This stance focuses directly on the decision process: What are the key issues coming up? What institution is empowered to decide whether a program will be approved? Who are the key actors? Who may influence them? When will the decision be made? What information is likely to be relevant to those who decide? How much will the program cost? How will the expenditure benefit the residents of Cleveland? What are unintended but likely side-effects? In this situation, the planning director and senior staff must make judgments concerning issues and problems which may reach legislative form in the next six months or year. They must predict who will decide on what issue and they must program staff time and resource for efforts designed to bring information and analysis to bear on the problem. They must develop the program that the Planning Commission will support during discussions prior to decision. They must seek support for the program among those who will ultimately decide. All

of this takes time and attention; and it is not always successful. But since impacting the decision is the goal, the staff time must be allocated, and this further affects the style and program of the agency. We can be seen, then, as an agency deeply concerned with implementation as much as with policy formulation and analysis.

Third, the political process is unlikely to provide planners with clear statements indicating goals or objectives. In some cases, political leaders dispute objectives; in many cases they simply ignore them. In most cases, the planner lacks any authoritative political statement of what the problem is, what it is that must be maximized, or minimized or under what constraints. And his efforts to obtain such a statement are likely to end in frustration. Urban governments persist in avoiding any close identification of goals or objectives. They must. The purposes of some programs are cynical; the objectives of many more are multiple, and maintaining disparate sources of support for them requires ambiguity. Moreover, men who run for office know far more poignantly than researchers do the odds against getting change actually accomplished. They know, therefore, that large promises made with specificity are invitations of proof of failure two or four years later. Yet large promises must be made. Hence vagueness.

This is a decided hardship for those planners who, in the tradition of our profession, look to political leaders for concise

objectives. But we have an overriding goal that simple equity demands first and priority attention be given to the task of promoting wider choices and opportunities for those groups and individuals who have few, if any, choices. This goal gives great clarity and power to our analyses. It also puts us in the position of seeking clients in the hope of improving the equity of any given situation or in simply improving the quality of the political process itself. In itself, this is a great opportunity.

The fourth principle relates to the long pull and the need for planners to stay put and use all their resources in fighting for their objectives. The transit and housing examples related earlier cover a span of about four years. Just now the critical decisions are being made on the elements of the transit service package which will be presented to the voters for approval, and they are very large decisions indeed. If the planners involved in this issue had played their usual game of two-year musical-chairs while simply processing data for the pre-conceived notions of political decision-makers, we would have no opportunity to influence this decision whatever.

If we planners want to treat urban problems as simply a source of employment and institution-building, that is one matter. But if we seriously want to improve conditions in the cities we must understand that the challenge requires much more than our traditional responses. The planner is very likely to want to address a problem

only in terms of his own professional skills, and then to stop. He performs his regression, or builds his simulation; he identifies an apparent solution. He then represents it as lucidly and persuasively as he can to his client, the Planning Commission, and then he stops. Gentlemen -- that is not enough if we seriously intend to affect outcomes. Those who propose ends, and who care about outcomes must care about means. We must be prepared to spend some time and take some risks in improving city conditions and in moving toward greater equity which comes to almost the same thing. Planners who are serious about their work must understand more clearly that both decision-making and implementation are processes, not acts, and that both require their protracted participation.

So our work is cut out for us. We must better understand our moral and technical responsibilities as planners within a system driven by powerful economic and ideological forces. We must learn to interact with political and other public officials on their terms and accept our share of responsibility and risk in the day-to-day decision process. If we do, within the context I have described, we may play a major role in the future of the city; if we continue with our traditional focus on land use, zoning and design, then planners will perform some useful functions, but will play only a minor role in solving America's urban problems.