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CRAG and land use

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Apr. 13, 1974

Land Use Pondered By CRAG

The staff of the Columbia Region Association of Governments will spend the next three months trying to put some flesh on the bare bones of a regional land use idea picked by the CRAG executive board for detailed planning.

The concept, picked by a narrow vote over two others, is called the "combination," and is a compromise between so-called "concentration" and "dispersion" concepts of land use in the metropolitan area that includes Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington and Columbia Counties in Oregon and Clark County in Washington.

Mayor William Young of Beaverton, CRAG board chairman, emphasized that the choice is not a final one, but merely a request for a detailed staff presentation on the plan.

With a July deadline for consideration of a detailed land use concept, the executive board decided that the CRAG staff would have time to develop only one of the three proposals.

However, there was a great deal of disagreement on which one, and the vote was 9 to 7 for the combination concept. Under the weighted voting system, Mayor Neil Goldschmidt cast Portland's four votes in favor of that plan.

The General Advisory Board of CRAG had recommended adoption of the so-called dispersion concept, as did the Area Development Committee. The Criminal Justice Committee favored the concentration alternative, and so did Gerard Drummond, Tri-Met board chairman, who told CRAG members that "a major objective should be to reduce the need for transportation, the need to move from place to place."

The Public Works Committee decided that differences in the concepts were not "significant," and the Social Services Committee said a choice among the three concepts would be "ambiguous."

The Transportation Committee picked the combination plan, and so did Ernest Bonner, planning director for the City of Portland, although he said there is little solid information upon which to base a choice and "in some respects the three alternative concepts appear to be virtually indistinguishable."

"I think Ernie Bonner has done the executive board a favor by pointing out that the emperor has no clothes," quipped City Manager Lawrence Sprecher of Beaverton, chairman of the General Advisory Board.

The concentration concept is designed to concentrate urban development, to provide greater efficiency and lower service costs for most facilities.

The dispersion concept is supposed to avoid settlement of prime agricultural lands, and encourage outward dispersion into clustered communities, or "free standing cities."

The combination concept combines some features of both, and is meant to encourage radial transportation corridors.

All three plans allocate 74 square miles to urbanization. Under the concentration concept, it would be contiguous to the central urban area. Outlying urban areas would be emphasized in the dispersion concept, and radial corridors would be highlighted in the combination concept.

Of an expected 803,000 urban population increase in the metropolitan area, 90 per cent would go to the urban central area under the concentration plan, 24 per cent to outlying urban area under the dispersion plan and 80 per cent to the urban central area under the combination plan that would create higher density transit corridors, especially to Hillsboro and Oregon City.

~~1975~~ 1974

- The CRAG Executive Board has ~~been~~ before it a choice among three alternative regional land use concepts. The General Advisory Board has recommended adoption of the so-called dispersion concept. I have some reservations about that recommendation and offer this evaluation of the differences among the concepts as a prelude to a recommendation that the Executive Board adopt the ^{so-called} combination concept.

- In some respects, the three alternative concepts ~~are~~ ^{appear to be} virtually indistinguishable.

The words of the Area Development Committee are instructive in this regard.

As to conformance of each of the alternatives with adopted regional goals and policies; the Area Development Committee notes that "...regional growth and settlement goals and policies were about equally achievable under any of the concepts...."

As to the impact of each alternative on the natural environment, the Area Development Committee judged that "...in a general sense each (alternative) was equally successful in (checking) detrimental urban impacts on ~~the~~ natural environment." Their qualification of this judgment is also instructive -- "until a detailed natural resource inventory is complete, only a broad, largely judgmental assessment of environmental impact is possible." So maybe there are some differential impacts on the natural environment, and maybe there aren't. More about this later.

From the Public Works Committee comes further comment that "...from the standpoint of public works facilities, the differences between the concepts were not judged to be significant...." and that "...any one of the concepts could be served equally well."

The Social Services Committee's method of choosing from among the three alternatives produced "inconclusive" results, the staff of the Committee reporting that "...members of the Committee consider a choice among the three concepts ambiguous."

- In other respects, some committees felt there were clear differences among the alternatives.

~~The Transportation Committee stated it flatly and succinctly: "The combination (alternative) ... achieves the highest transit modal split. Dispersion the least. This is one of the few significant differences."~~

The Criminal Justice Committee championed the concentration alternative in such a way as to suggest there were significant differences among the alternatives. But a careful reading of their rationale fails to uncover what those differences were.

The Area Development Committee felt that "...relatively self-sustaining, identifiable communities (should) be the back bone of the regional settlement pattern...." and that the dispersion concept best manifested this goal. But "self-sustaining, identifiable communities" would appear to be possible (in fact, implied) under any of the alternative schemes presented. As noted in the table below, the dispersion and combination concepts are almost identical as to number of urban areas by population -- a crucial determinatⁿ of any community's ability to be self-sustaining. And the concentration scheme is so close as to be

Inset 'A'

The Transportation Committee, ~~that~~ was more self-assured of its choice of the combination concept than any other committee ~~alone in its~~ the only committee favoring the combination concept. The process followed in coming to this conclusion, ~~however~~ and the information at hand for their decision, however, were noteworthy. Each concept was tested for its modal split characteristics and its propensity to generate trips to downtown Portland. The results of this testing show clearly the advantage to mass transit systems and the attractiveness of downtown Portland ~~with~~ with the concentration or combined (radial corridor) concept and the opposite for the dispersion concept. Thus, the Transportation Committee's judgment that the concentration or combination concept best served the goal of

a balanced transportation system or maximum use of public transportation is based on reasonable evidence gained from considerable analysis. Further, their analysis shows that a significant difference among the alternative concepts does exist.

conjecture as to the extent one concept might help to achieve a more favorable energy situation." If conservation of energy were a secondary goal of the CRAG planning process, this lack of attention might be permitted. But conservation of energy has a prominent place in CRAG's goal statements. Not to know how each concept serves that major goal seems a major failing indeed. Similarly, the Area Development Committee obviously did not accept the Transportation Committee's judgment that mass transit would be more feasible under the combination or concentration concept than the dispersion concept: "The (Area Development) Committee raised important questions as to whether such corridors would actually accomplish favorable mass transit conditions." But ^{some} ~~factual~~ evidence ~~is~~ supports ~~either~~ ^{the Transportation Committee. None is offered by the Area Development} ~~view (such as will come, in part, from the Governor's Task Force) Committee in their as support for their questioning.~~ ~~was not made a part of the deliberations.~~

Finally, and equally important, "...the (Area Development) Committee could not make definitive judgments as to which concept would 'cost out' with the lowest public expenditures." Still, the Committee concluded that "...by increasing the size of small outlying communities the provision of full urban services in such communities would be more economical." But it has already been shown above that all three concepts reduce the number of small communities and that the distribution of cities by size is ^{virtually} the same in all concepts. How then can one concept be better than another? Only if the central city is so large under the concentration or combination concept that diseconomies of scale set in -- an outcome also not analyzed to such an extent

that reasonable judgments can be made. In short, the alternative concepts came to the General Advisory Board and then to the Executive ~~Committee~~ ^{Board} without the evaluation needed to demonstrate how each of the concepts serves important goals of the CRAG planning process:

conservation of energy
 efficiency in public investments
 maximum use of public transportation

- It appears that some of the Committee members were hesitant to choose from among the three alternative concepts prior to some greater understanding of the specific ramifications of each concept. In a memo from the staff to the Area Development Committee it was noted that "some committee members, from time to time, have expressed the feeling that a decision would be easier to make if more were known about what each of the concepts meant in detail. This amounts to asking that all three concepts be detailed before a decision is made....this might lighten the burden some...(but) it could introduce new uncertainties, further delaying a decision. In any event and as mentioned several times before, there is simply too little time between now and July, 1974 to attempt to detail more than a single concept for public discussion."

But there seem to be several reasons for hesitation in the decision of the Executive Board.

First, and of crucial importance, the Board should ask - as a bare minimum - for ~~a complete~~ ^{a reasonable} analysis of the extent to which the three concepts serve the major goals adopted by CRAG. If

this involves much more detailed analysis of each alternative, that is the price the Board should be willing to pay for assurance that choosing one of the options will not foreclose another which more effectively accomplishes a fundamental adopted goal. If energy may or may not be conserved, if public costs may or may not be minimized, if environmental impacts may or may not be detrimental, how does the Board know that any or all of the concepts truly serve the major CRAG goals?

Second, the Board should know what specific obstacles to implementation exist, which obstacles can be surmounted and how, and whether special difficulties will beset any one of the concepts.

Finally, consensus reached on concepts is not a valued consensus, nor is it long-lived. Until the details of each concept are known and understood, agreement on the concept is worthless. Before the Board rushes to choose a single concept to guide this region and then presents a single detailed plan for public ~~"discussion"~~ ^{"discussion"} it should assure its own profound understanding of the "details" of each alternative -- not just the "details" of one of the alternatives.

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~~While it seems clear that more information ~~must~~ must precede a rational choice from among the alternatives, this ~~is not~~ ^{need} not ~~be~~ inordinately delay a decision.~~

~~Therefore I recommend that the Board~~

- If a choice ^{among the} ~~of~~ concepts must be made now — and it is unclear exactly why this choice needs to be made ~~to~~ quickly — then it should be understood that the choice cannot be informed by the kind of information and analysis that would best inform ^{our} ~~the~~ choice. In that event, the choice should be made on the basis of the goals sought by the ~~a~~ three concepts.

The concentration concept ~~is~~ ^{was} ~~designed~~ designed to

concentrate urban development in order to "...offer significant advantages in terms of lower urban service costs for most facilities. In a word, efficiency was the underlying rationale."

The dispersal concept was designed to "...avoid settlement of prime agricultural lands and reshape the pressures for outward expansion (dispersal) into clustered communities rather than scattered settlement."

The combination concept was designed to "...achieve some of the advantages of both... and it is avowedly more oriented toward creating and supporting public ~~transit~~ transit possibilities than the other two."

Thus, the combination concept recognizes ^{s that} a basic tension ~~among the major goals~~ between the ~~required~~ ~~settlement goal~~ goal of promoting community identity and self-sustenance by ~~concentrating~~ ^{directing} growth ~~to~~ ~~into~~ outlying, existing towns and cities, and the goal of ~~providing~~ providing public services (water, sewer, transportation, etc.) more efficiently ~~by~~ by directing growth to the existing urbanized area. To choose ^{the} concentration

concept is to ~~minimize~~ turn away from the goal of

minimizing the costs of public facilities attendant to

future growth. To choose the dispersion concept is to

turn away from ~~the~~ the goals of clustered, self-

sustaining communities and urban-rural differentiation.

The combination concept was meant to place those two competing goals into some kind of balance — recognizing that both goals are worthy, that both goals should be served, but not one at the expense of the other.

When adequate information exists, the success of this compromise is obvious. At planned full development of the region, 1,003,000 people live in the unincorporated areas of the ~~total~~ region in the dispersion concept — most in the ~~at~~ areas contiguous to outlying ~~and~~ existing urban areas. The combination concept calls for 938,000 people living in those same unincorporated areas — a difference of 65,000 people, or about 6-7%. Clearly, outlying cities will receive a substantial amount of the new growth, and

identifiable, self-sustaining communities will ~~not~~ ^(have an important place in) the combination concept—though not as important as in the dispersion concept. At the same time, the combination concept has been demonstrated ^(by the work of the transportation committee) ~~as a~~ to be a close second to the concentration concept in its support of public transportation and existing major employment centers of the region. If complete information on all public facility costs were known it is probable that the combination concept would ~~not~~ be only slightly behind the concentration concept in its efficiency of public improvement expenditures.

So the combination concept ~~is not as good as the concentration and dispersion concepts~~ loses when it plays the concentration and dispersion concepts on their own field. But the combination concept is the winner everytime

on a neutral field.

- If the Executive Board must decide now, it cannot ~~omit~~ enlist the aid of ^{careful} ~~detailed~~ analysis as to the ^{detailed} ramifications of each concept. It must decide among goals. If the Board feels the goals of efficiency, community identity, and urban-rural differentiation are all worthy, it must logically choose the combination concept — that concept which most clearly ~~and~~ serves all in a balance of competing goals. If the Board feels efficiency ~~in~~ public improvement expenditures is more important than the goal of community identity and urban-rural differentiation, then it must logically choose the concentration concept. In the reverse case, the dispersion concept must logically be chosen.

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I feel all the goals are worthy. I, therefore,
~~recommend~~ recommend the combination concept, for adoption by the
Executive Board.