

## *Planning as a Useful Activity*

*Planning is Preparing to Solve Known Problems, Being Ready for Unanticipated Events and Taking Advantage of Opportunities.*

### **A “PLUG” FOR PLANNING.**

Amazingly, not everyone believes planning is a useful activity. There are the old “communism” cries that have pretty much disappeared and there are the budget hawks who don’t give priority to anticipating and influencing future events for the betterment of the community.

Another prevailing group is the one that wants to reduce regulations; the planning profession has enabled this group by its over-emphasis on regulations to the detriment of infrastructure planning, long range financial planning, urban design and general planning for transportation, schools, neighborhoods and parks.

### **TRADITIONAL CITY PLANNING.**

Having said all that, planning prevails, more or less, everywhere. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, planners have new opportunities to be useful. In addition to traditional comprehensive planning for land use, transportation, open space and infrastructure, there are new issues to address.

The long-neglected inclusion of law enforcement and education as part of local government comprehensive plans, at least in Florida, still needs to be rectified while new issues emerge.

### **INVASION BY ORGANIZED RADICALS.**

The reaction to the events in Charlottesville included a reflection that such an event was not fully anticipated and surely not planned for.

Preparations and operational activities were hurriedly enacted. Regulatory, infrastructure and operational plans would have helped ameliorate the situation.

### **MASS MURDERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ABUSES.**

The potential for mass murders in schools, theaters, churches and elsewhere has become a concern of every responsible city and town in America. Gun control may be part of the answer, but individual mental health along with community health and socialization programs are opportunities for planners to contribute to solving important problems.

Law enforcement abuses have weakened an important local institution. Planning activities that connect law enforcement with communities and neighborhoods are happening in many places; connections with the planning department offer another opportunity.

### **NATURAL DISASTERS.**

Planning for natural disasters is becoming more mainstream than ever, yet improvements can be offered through data-driven planning.

Flood plain protection, controlled rebuilding in the flood plain after a flood, shelter locations and servicing and evacuation transportation routing are being effectuated by emergency agencies. Inculcation into the general planning process is important.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS.**

For those believers, planning for the impacts of climate change offers real benefits. Land use planning to remove people and structures from areas to be inundated has time for implementation, infrastructure to hold back the water or pump it out of streets and homes requires advanced planning.

Reductions in greenhouse gases and other pollutions take time but has to start and persist. The straw that breaks the system is probably in your soft drink – attention to the impact of drinking straws is telling.

### **NEW LAND USE INTRUSIONS.**

Short term rentals are proliferating. Their demand means they fulfill a need in society and the marketplace for shelter. Their demand doesn't mean they should destroy neighborhoods or disrupt community life.

Planning for the location and operational characteristics of short term rentals is an important planning activity resulting from this new variety of shelter that has only appeared in recent decades. Some communities have experience to share with those just introduced to the issue.

Airbnb is another innovation in the travel industry. Thoughtful programs for location and operation can prevent neighborhood disruptions. Learning about this form of over-night accommodation and preparing for its appearance in your city is an important planning function.

### **NEW TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS**

Vehicles are taking on many new forms that will change the urban scene. Automated vehicles [AVs] present opportunities and challenges. How to handle parking, cruising, accidents, insurance and their interface with

pedestrians is a topic of growing importance. Incorporating AVs into transportation, land use and public safety elements of the general plan is important.

Automated vehicles that are common carriers and delivery vehicles complicate the picture. The remaining taxis, the ride-share vehicles, mass transit vehicles and delivery trucks, both local and over-the-road, are being developed and deployed. Planners have to figure out how to incorporate these new modes of mobility into the city system.

Electric vehicles [EVs] present different challenges. Charging station locations and the impact on gas tax revenues are two issues needing attention. The combination of AVs and EVs is another challenge. Automated vehicles in bus rapid transit systems powered by roof-mounted solar panels are going to be terrific, but they need to be part of a comprehensive mobility system yet to be designed.

### **NEW INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS**

The general availability of high-speed broadband internet service is the challenge of our times. Those with it at home will prosper; those without it will not. Education, employment and communication demand technological skills and connection to global information systems.

Developing this critical infrastructure system as a utility, public or private but available to all, rather than a commercial service is the defining issue for the future of the city. Kansas City is a good example of a city that recognizes the situation. However, in most cities, the commercial service providers are prevailing, service is being provided only where it is profitable; the general public without service is losing.

## **MIGRATION.**

Migration is generally considered an issue for someone else, an issue for other nations, an issue the federal government deals with, effectively or not; except in the border states in the southwest U.S. where it is very real, very specific and very impactful.

But if we step back and consider who is an immigrant, we broaden our perspective. Florida, my home state, thrives on immigrants from the mid-west and northeast. They arrive in large numbers, impact community character and assimilate.

In both case with domestic immigration and foreign immigration, the issues are generally the same. How can the newly arrived families become productive members of the community? Most domestic newcomers are welcomed to town, formally or informally, and slowly they find a place. Foreign immigrants have a different experience. They may not speak English, they may not have lived with what we consider the modern conveniences of life, they may not have trusted institutions such as law enforcement, the school system or the economy.

Cities must acknowledge the growth of immigration in their town, if not today, tomorrow. Planners offer the skills and knowledge to create programs to help new arrivals find homes, find jobs and find organizations that fulfill their lives. The challenge is to help new arrivals, domestic and foreign, become good citizens.

Planners, plans and programs can do this. Small cities and towns can make this work; programs can be developed, education in civics can be provided, volunteerism can be demonstrated. Cities are the entry point for all immigrants, be prepared to develop citizens.

## **CONCLUSIONS.**

The planning profession arose with the new challenges early in the last century when the ill-effects of the industrial revolution diminished the benefits of city living. Factories, pollution, congestion, crime and poor housing typified much of the urban scene. Infrastructure planning, data-driven disease prevention, planning for cars, streets, inter-urban trains and airports were accompanied by new planning and zoning laws, parks planning, public health programs and child labor laws. Planning was useful in responding to new conditions.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century brings new challenges for the profession. The planner has the tools, the breadth of knowledge and the communicative abilities many other city-oriented professions lack. Planners understand the scientific process that believes in data and experimentation; and the planning process that defines goals, uses data, considers alternatives and selects plans that best fit the goals and the data.

The issues of gang violence, new uses of land, climate change, new modes of mobility, full community access to technology and accepting immigrants into society challenge the character of all communities; and we are still working on poverty, racism, blighted neighborhoods, under-employment, poorly funded infrastructure and growing individual isolation.

Regulations and remedies after the fact are not useful. Preparation is essential. Resistance to proper planning, and properly funded planning, is not the conservative approach to good government, risk management and cost effectiveness. Now is the time to bring our game.