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## Community Planning

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H. S. COBLENTZ

## *Community Planning*

Planning as a municipal activity is new to most New Mexico municipalities. Albuquerque was the fastest growing area in the United States between 1940 and 1955. The town had 35,000 persons in 1940 and 175,000 in 1955—a growth of almost 500 per cent. Farmington, population center of the San Juan oil basin in northwest New Mexico, had a population growth from 3,637 to 14,000 in the same period. But until the last few years, community facilities, both publicly and privately provided, have lagged behind the desired level.

In a sporadically-developed state such as New Mexico it is essential that there be some fundamental planning, for there are three resources which must be properly utilized if the community is to prosper: human, physical, and economic. Each of these resources is dependent on the other and underlies the basic philosophy of planning, which is a means of directing future growth with the best use of people, land, and money as its goal.

New Mexico has seen many changes in the last fifty years. Obsolescence, a problem in old cities, is not so much of a problem here since the communities have changed so considerably that the original cores are now but a small part of the urban scene. Problems which have been partially solved elsewhere in the United States are just beginning to be recognized as present in New Mexico: the need for urban redevelopment and for comprehensive planning of all public works, including schools, parks, and health services, for example. The Federal Government has brought about great land use changes to the state. In addi-

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tion, the Federal Government is spending money on municipal and state schemes such as sewage plants, schools; and, probably the most dramatic, the interstate highway system. For instance, in Albuquerque two—and possibly three—freeways will traverse the city creating land use problems which are quite different from any encountered so far in the state. These are some of the community problems involving planning. Are we as a state and a community equipped to deal with them?

I would suggest that by and large we are not. At the state level there are many agencies dealing with the use of land, such as the Highway Department, the State Land Office, and the State Engineer. However, apart from the Governor's Office there is no overall examination of problems. The Economic Development Commission could be used for this, but so far it has been concerned mainly with promotional aspects of industrial development. At the city level there is prepared a general plan which consists of many individual plans; at the interim stage the administrative head, the city manager, acts as an "editor," resolving conflicts between one plan and another. At the Federal level, the Bureau of the Budget carries out these functions for the President and the Cabinet. But here in New Mexico such organization does not exist, and I would suggest that this is to the detriment of good state and municipal government. In an article, "A Proposal for Assisting Local Planning in New Mexico," (*New Mexico Business*, December, 1956), I advocated adoption of state enabling legislation to permit communities to obtain local planning funds on a 50-50 matching basis under the provisions of Section 701, Title VII, Federal Housing Act of 1954. The money so obtained can be spent on land-use plans, thoroughfare plans, basic population, economic surveys, and the like. In contrast to the urban renewal program, there is no specific performance requirement and the funds would enable the large number of New Mexico communities, presently without any professional assistance, to start thinking and planning for the future. To permit these communities to participate under Section 701 would require that a state organization be appointed to act as the intermediary between the municipality and the H.H.F.A. This type of agency could also be used as a clearing house to coordinate those major activities of state government concerned with land use. Presently vast sums of money are being spent by state agencies but with little real awareness of the over-all problems of the community they are assisting.

New Mexico, fortunately, is not plagued with such problems of metropolitan communities in the rest of the country as incorporated fringe municipalities stifling the expansion of the central city, or with an excessive number of local government agencies exerting different influences on the community's growth. This in spite of the fact that rapid urbanization of New Mexico has taken place in the last decade. The small agricultural villages have lost people to the thirty or so towns around the state, and the thousands of newcomers to the state have moved to these urban centers. So far the state has not been ruined by the ugliness of growth which seems to contaminate American cities, but unless positive administrative steps are taken now we may well have this transmogrification on our doorstep.

Albuquerque stands alone in the state as a population "giant" with about a quarter of a million persons in its urban area, forty thousand of them outside the city limits. The city has had a population growth in part of its northeast section of 800 per cent, or approximately 24,500, bringing it to 27,000 persons, during the five-year period of 1950 to 1955. Yet the street paving program in the city is still way behind what it should be, and the state is limited in the amount of money that it can spend on urban streets. In 1957, Albuquerque paved more arterials than in the previous six years, but many arterials are still unpaved. Even private utilities cannot keep pace with rapid population growth occurring in places such as Farmington. Planning—and really this means advance planning—can avoid many of the problems of growth which require "last-minute" decisions.

For some reason not entirely clear, there is no rationale for planning the community acceptable at all levels of government. People know that health and educational services are not yet fully provided, that recreational areas remain undeveloped, that blighted parts of our towns house families living on substandard wages, and so on. These are not matters to be solved in one day, and they are not solely the concern of government, but I suggest that because of loose coordinate thinking on the part of government, these problems are nowhere near solution. An approach to planning needs to be made at all levels of government, but especially at the state level here in New Mexico, if all its communities are to meet the future successfully. Zoning—so often thought of as planning—appears small in the total picture, but from the neighborhood to the entire state there has to be new and creative thinking on all problems of land development.