CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT GOALS

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where -- " said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

* * * *

"Why keep talking about the future . . . unless there are among us some who are willing to start walking into it?"

Louis C. Bisso, New Orleans (1957)

At the moment, Alice didn't know exactly where she was. That was one reason she didn't care much where she went. Her dilemma illustrates the circularity characteristic of much deliberative action. To know where you want to go and what you want to do you have to know first what your present status is and what is wrong with it. Or, to put it another way, before problems are solved, they must be identified.

The purpose of this report is to show the value of setting up clear-cut objectives for central business district improvement programs and to give examples of types of goals developed by a number of planning agencies. The emphasis is on goal formulation as a part of the planning process rather than on what the goals should be.1

Goal formulation ordinarily is stated as the first step in the planning

1Although the objectives discussed in this information report are common to a number of cities, they are used for purposes of illustration only. It is not inferred that they all are necessarily desirable goals for all cities, or that they are the only ones.

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process -- one that is followed by survey and analysis of the situation, discovery of solutions, and decision and implementation. And yet, as a practical matter, survey and analysis must often precede the determination of objectives. John D. Millett, writing on "The Planning Process" in The Process and Organization of Government Planning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), comments on the relation between knowledge of a situation and setting objectives:

Fixing objectives is but one phase of planning. Another phase is a clear comprehension of the existing situation. For only by measuring the gap between what we now have and what we want, can we fix the true magnitude of the job to be done through administrative action.

Due perhaps to the need for fact gathering, the first step in the planning process may sometimes be slighted. Because of the scientific attitude with which most planning studies are undertaken, it is easy to move from survey and analysis to recommendations for solutions without returning along the way to the first step -- formulation of objectives. This is not to say that goals and objectives are overlooked; rather they are perhaps too much taken for granted.

Fundamental objectives are implicit in all planning studies -- since all plans prepared by or for public agencies are undertaken in accordance with the police power purposes of the state enabling legislation. To make them explicit is not always necessary in planning studies that have a limited circulation. Furthermore, if constantly reiterated, statements of goals become monotonous, seem over-simplified, and take on the aspect of clichés.

Strictly speaking, setting community planning goals is a function of lawmakers. But this does not mean that the planning commission and staff should ignore this important step. Frederick J. Adams of Massachusetts Institute of Technology points out that "the planner must take a responsible part in the identification of and agreement by the community upon social and economic goals as well as in their translation into a three-dimensional physical pattern." (Urban Planning Education in the United States. Cincinnati: The Alfred Bettman Foundation, 1954.)

Because the local planning function is delegated to the planning agency, the agency probably is obligated to apply the generalized goals of the enabling act to particular situations. Because of its research function, the planning agency has factual knowledge of the physical and economic characteristics of the community. And because of its obligation to make recommendations based on that research, it is in a position to see the effects of policies and decisions on the attainment of long-range goals. (The relation between policy making and goal attainment is discussed by Robert A. Walker in The Planning Function of Urban Government, Millett, op. cit., and others.)

The planning staff is well equipped to aid in developing community goals because of its technical training also. One of the difficulties in developing particular community goals is that they represent a high level of abstraction. It is difficult in the first place -- because of the com-
munity's complex structures and functions -- to see how the community acts as a unit. It is equally difficult to abstract from the views of this complex community of individuals a statement of what their goals are as a group. Analyzing and summarizing many kinds of economic and sociological data are a part of the inductive reasoning that underlies the planning process. Determining goals is closely related to these techniques.

A danger inherent in all planning as it becomes more expert is that it may become too far removed from public understanding and support. Planning commissions and staffs are aware of this danger, of course, and seek constantly to engage the public's interest and participation at various stages in the planning process. Speaking of the British Town and Country Planning Acts of 1947, Sir George Pepler observed:

One lesson above all that I have learned and relearned during the past year is the extent to which statutory provisions such as the new planning law depend for their success on the force of public opinion behind them. Experts can make plans and dictators enforce them but . . . in the long run the only planning that will succeed is that which the public wants. (Journal of the Town Planning Institute, September-October 1949.)

There is little doubt that the forming of goals -- that is, "what the public wants" -- is an important part of the planning process. How to crystallize them and how to present them is not a simple matter, however. Most often, in reports and other types of presentations, a statement of goals precedes the general discussion. Sometimes it is woven into the body of the report in less obvious form.

Judging from the activity in central business district renewal, this program is one that especially benefits from having its objectives clearly understood. Reasons for emphasizing CBD goals are many, but essentially they boil down to the fact that the central business district itself is a highly complex mechanism, the improvement of which depends more on private than public financing.

The particular value of setting goals for the central business district is well explained by Arnett W. Leslie in Goals for Central Minneapolis -- Its Function and Design:

1. Goals give direction to those responsible for planning public facilities, enabling them to prepare plans in closer accord with community desires.

2. They help to avoid confusion of basic issues with secondary questions or details and thus help achieve clearer and more pointed discussion of each.

3. They can create a common ground of agreement which is so necessary when many individuals and groups are actually involved in preparing and achieving plans.

4. They can prepare the way for achievement by warding off un-
warranted, Johnny-come-lately criticism when the time comes to put a plan into effect.

CBD Improvement a Private-Public Affair

Because of what ails it, the central business district cannot be improved without investment of private funds. Store modernization, landscaping, and exterior decoration, for instance, must all be undertaken by private owners investing their own money.

Furthermore, certain public remedies should have the support of business interests. Proposals to eliminate overhanging signs, to change the use, height, and bulk provisions of the zoning ordinance as it affects the CBD; and to modify traffic routes have all been opposed by downtown businessmen in the past and have sometimes been defeated.

Finally, to justify the expenditure of public funds in the improvement of a land area as large as that taken up by the CBD, it must be shown that the investment will be worthwhile and not a losing proposition. Street closings, building of circumferential arteries, and construction of pedestrian malls all cost a great deal of money. Even such relatively inexpensive items as street trees, designed waste receptacles, and potted plants cost thousands of dollars and would be hard to justify in the absence of private investment in the future of the CBD.

For all these reasons, central business district improvement must be undertaken as a total program if it is to succeed. Although any one private improvement -- such as store modernization -- may increase the profits of the entrepreneur and improve the value of his property, the effect on the entire area is likely to be negligible. A major public improvement -- such as a new freeway -- will doubtless improve access to the CBD, but it alone will not result in a "revitalized CBD."

Because of the financial stake private business has in maintaining or regaining an economically healthy central business district, the possibility of getting its support for an improvement program seems hopeful. In some cities businessmen's organizations have campaigned for private investment in central business district improvements. Their success indicates that under the proper circumstances, similar programs will work in other cities.

A number of CBD reports emphasize how the cooperation of private business is essential to success. Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for example, observes:

The preservation of the downtown is a problem which must be of concern to city government, downtown businessmen, and the community as a whole. It is important that all realize that the central business district provides approximately 20 per cent of the entire assessed valuation of most cities for tax purposes . . . . If this district is allowed to deteriorate, property value will decrease and the subsequent effects, including tax increases, will be felt throughout the community.²

²All reports referred to by name of city are listed in the bibliography at the end of this report.
And in Cleveland the importance of private business participation is emphasized throughout the report:

Downtown Cleveland is largely an area of private property and private endeavor. Its total revitalization is therefore signal dependent upon private initiative.

If the fruits of the plan are to be actually realized, business and civic leadership must not only thoroughly understand the nature of the possibilities and opportunities posed by the plan, but such leadership must also lend continuing support to the plan and its objectives.

If it is true that private investment is necessary to the success of CBD improvement, then it is important that private groups take part in the planning process from the beginning. As a segment of the public with a strong economic interest in the well-being of the CBD, private groups -- institutional as well as commercial -- are in a good position to help formulate objectives that are both reasonable and realistic.

In some cities, the impetus for CBD redevelopment has come from a "downtown improvement association" formed for that purpose. Too much reliance on a promotional campaign, however, and too little emphasis on a sustained program has meant loss of interest and failure in some cases. Success apparently depends on a full understanding by all parties involved of the importance of the program, a realization that it cannot be achieved overnight, and that it will involve spending money. Even though Alice didn't much care where she got to, public and private groups must both want to get some place if they are to get there.

Different ways of involving private groups in CBD planning have been attempted in different cities, but there is probably no one successful approach. Opinion surveys are one of the more popular methods and present an excellent means of finding out what the public wants. Although it would probably be a mistake to draw up objectives on the basis of returns alone, they help pinpoint major problems, furnish ideas for solutions, and help arouse interest. A survey was recently made in Portland, Maine, for example, in which the viewpoints of two groups were solicited: downtown businessmen and shoppers.

Because of the magnitude of the task, the duration of the program, and the complexity of the problem, some kind of permanent association of business leaders is invaluable. The success of businessmen's associations such as the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the Detroit Central Business District Association, and the Downtown Denver Improvement Association, to mention only a few, demonstrate their effectiveness.

Another method is to appoint citizens advisory committees to work with the planning agency in developing different stages of the plan. In Denver, for example, 95 persons were appointed to a committee to advise the planning office in a study of central area land uses. The Downtown Denver Im-
provement Association, Denver Board of Realtors, and the Chamber of Commerce made the appointments. Members served on 11 different subcommittees, one for each type of land use.

Whatever the means, it is highly important that representatives of downtown interests help develop the goals for CBD improvement. Experience has shown that proposals for central business district improvement that do not have the understanding and support of private businesses and institutions early in the game are unlikely to gain momentum enough to put across a comprehensive and imaginative program. Success apparently depends in large measure on the possession by public and private groups of clear-cut goals, carried out by public and private organizations that have a sustained and well financed program.

Clarity of Goals

Unless a goal is clearly understood, efforts to achieve it will be desultory and probably ineffective. Clarity is essential to understanding -- and understanding is essential both to effective planning and to public support. "... the greater the clarity of goals associated with an activity, the greater the propensity to engage in it." 3

This principle, which apparently is well understood by private business and industry, is expounded more fully by H. S. Person, a management consultant:

The beginning -- the foundation, the sine qua non -- of effective planning is complete and clear specification of objective by general administration. The unknown cannot be planned; that which is not clearly understood cannot be well planned. Effectiveness of planning varies directly with completeness and clearness of understanding of the goal. The beginning of good general administrative planning is a clear definition of objective; and the remainder of it rests on that definition. 4

There is no recipe for making CBD goals clear in the minds of the public, the legislators, and the planning agency except to say that they must be well thought out. To return again to Alice: everyone involved must know where they want to get to.

Part of the answer is found in the process by which goals are set up. If offered from on high, they may seem too abstract, too idealistic and romantic, and their presentation may be resented or ignored. Worse yet, they may fail to truly represent what the community wants. One road to clarity, then, is procedural: it lies in having all interested parties or their representatives take part in the process of drawing up the objectives.

Another lies in the direction of logic. Statements of policy should not


4"Research and Planning as Functions of Administration and Management," by H. S. Person, Public Administration Review, Autumn 1940.
be confused with goals, nor should problems or solutions. Goals should be arranged in some order — either of importance or magnitude. Subsidiary goals should be understood, and their relationship to the main goal — good economic health of the CBD — pointed out.

A third road to clarity lies in ordinary good writing. A central business district improvement program by its nature is to a large extent a public information and promotional campaign. From the beginning, the presentation should be well organized, and the text written clearly, vigorously, and plainly. This caution applies to planning agency staff reports, to technical reports with limited distribution, and above all, to those intended for community groups and the public.

General Goals

As we have seen, it is essential to achievement of goals that they be clearly and completely stated. For this reason, it is often advantageous to develop two sets of goals for the future development of a central business district. First, a fundamental, underlying goal toward which all programs developed later presumably will be directed. And second, subsidiary and more specific goals that grow out of the underlying goal.

The examples that follow have been selected from several central business district reports. Their common theme is the improvement of the CBD so that it can fulfill the purposes for which it is best suited. This belief underlies much planning philosophy and fits in with the functional approach to land use planning. Despite their anthropomorphic slant, such statements are useful and valuable because they provide a frame of reference against which future actions can be measured. Some of the statements, it will be noted, place the CBD in a particular relationship to the rest of the city.

San Francisco wants a downtown area that works well and looks well, is conveniently arranged and easy to get to.

* * * * *

... A Capitol Square District (in Madison, Wisconsin) that possesses continuous economic health.

... A Capitol Square District which is able to serve efficiently the changing needs of the community and of the broader markets that it serves.

... A Capitol Square District that is inspiring and stimulating in its beauty.

* * * * *

It has been previously established that the heart of Cleveland is exceedingly important to the health and well-being of the City of Cleveland and to the entire Cleveland Metro-
politan Area... A Revitalized Downtown in an Expanding Region Must also Be the Goal.

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Palm Springs must act boldly and promptly in order to preserve the leisurely, relaxed atmosphere which is one of her most attractive features as a resort... and to safeguard the future health of the commercial district.

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The goal is to make the Detroit CBD "both attractive and efficient, and economically competitive with new planned commercial centers such as Northland Shopping Center."

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Since Seattle's central area is the heart of finance, commerce, and trade for a vast region, the goal should be the future healthy growth of the central area. [Paraphrased]

* * * * *

Of more importance, it [The development plan for the Chicago central area] strives to give to all the people the best there is of urban living in providing for convenience, recreation, culture, entertainment, religious participation, and the unlimited opportunity for a rich and varied life that only a great city can give.

* * * * *

The [Huskegon, Michigan] CBD must, if it is to retain its position as the heart of the metropolitan area, reflect the new living pattern of the American people and consequently must provide areas in which people can relax, drift, contemplate and enjoy the living, working and shopping that downtown provides. . . .

The revitalization which we seek must be in consonance with the demands and requirements for not only today but the future. . . .

An objective of the plan is that each development in the CBD will be a contributor to the area as a whole as well as a sound economic investment in itself.

Accessibility

Ease of reaching the central business district has been a fundamental reason for its importance as the center of economic and social life. Acces-
sibility has been reduced, however, because of increased motor vehicle use and traffic congestion, and because of deficiency of parking spaces and inefficient public transportation facilities. Improving accessibility, therefore, is one of the prime factors in central business district "revitalization."

The goal of accessibility, simply stated, is: "The people who come downtown [in Mi.am] to work, to shop, or to transact business, must be able to get to the downtown area (be it by private vehicle or mass transit) quickly, safely, comfortably, and economically."

Also succinct is the following: "There is no alternative to the goal of accessibility for central Minneapolis. It must be possible for persons who desire to work or obtain services or merchandise in the area to get to it conveniently, quickly, and economically."

Or in still other words: "A lasting solution to the problems of downtown [Cleveland] revitalization must therefore recognize the necessity for maintaining the most efficient, economical, and convenient system of access possible -- for people and goods -- to the center from the region."

With the growth of a metropolitan area, the accessibility of the central business district will diminish as the outer borders of the trade area become more remote and traffic increases. Therefore, the goal of an accessible CBD should encompass not only improved accessibility at present, but also a future CBD easily reached from all parts of its natural trade area. Referring to Reilly's Law of Retail Gravitation, the drafters of the Muskegon report observe that if access to the CBD is improved by reducing travel time from outlying areas, the influence of the CBD should be extended rather than diminished, and that the "potential expansion" of the CBD might increase over and above that due to natural growth.

The size of a trading area is a function also of terminal capacity, when automobiles are the chief form of transportation. Consequently, accessibility is likely to be improved with improved parking facilities; and needless to say, increased parking is one of the major proposals for CBD improvement. If the goal of accessibility is reviewed in terms of automobiles only, however, the discovery of other possible solutions may be blocked off because of preoccupation with the obvious.

**Compactness**

The advantage of compactness is that it permits short walking distances within and between the functional areas of the central business district. A compact CBD encourages development of centralized transportation facilities and terminals, and facilitates interchange of goods and services. "The one physical characteristic that most directly determines the efficiency of the [Seattle] central business district is compactness."

Compactness as a goal has several aspects. In the sense of "taking little space" it refers to the total area of the CBD. To some extent, the area of the central business district is a function of the size of the city and of
the nature and extent of the regional trade area. Thus, compactness is a relative term. It also refers to the arrangement and distribution of buildings within the CBD. The degree of concentration of employment and the intensity of land use (or building coverage), therefore, affect the compactness of the CBD.

On first thought it might seem as if the ability to influence compactness of the central business district would be quite limited -- considering the fact that most central business districts are already intensively developed. But given compactness as an objective, examination will show that the opportunities for achievement are often greater than at first expected.

One avenue is through analysis of existing land uses to see to what extent they consist of CBD uses. In Miami, for example, approximately 85 per cent of the total space in buildings and vacant lots is devoted to "CBD uses" (retail stores, business offices, banks, restaurants and entertainment, commercial hotels, parking lots and garages.) In Cincinnati it was found that since 1937 the three largest users of floor space in the CBD have been retailing, business services, and consumer services -- business activities that rely on pedestrian concentration and that generate most of the pedestrian traffic. Since 1937 the amount of floor space used for retailing and consumer services has decreased (as has the amount for manufacturing and wholesaling without stock). The amount used for business services, on the other hand, has increased (as has wholesaling with stock and parking). Without deliberate effort to halt this "downward drift" it may go on indefinitely.

In consideration of the importance of a rejuvenated central business district to the entire Cincinnati metropolitan area, the objective is to reverse past trends effectively by 1975:

Planning goals must be based on a determined effort to reverse the trends and increase activity with the CBD. A target goal would be approximately 13 per cent increase of general floor space.

The goal would be to plan the core for retailing, business services, and consumer services, which depend upon pedestrian interaction, and plan for the location of other functions around the core.

Study of ways to achieve compactness might indicate a need to delineate functional areas within the CBD. In Cincinnati and Tacoma, for instance, the central business districts have been divided into "core" areas and "frames" that surround the cores. It might indicate the desirability of discouraging further development of "non-CBD" uses. Or it might indicate the need -- as in Cincinnati -- to increase the amount of floor space devoted to business functions characteristic of the central business district.

Improved Appearance

The trend in modern commercial centers is toward a colorful, artistic appearance -- sometimes called a trend toward beauty. In any event, an im-
proved central business district appearance makes for a more distinctive character and entices more shoppers downtown. The success of designed shopping centers has demonstrated to the satisfaction of most people that "amenity" -- pleasant surroundings, including some landscaping -- is profitable.

For the pedestrian or motorist in the central business district the small things -- details of buildings, light poles, signs, street furniture, landscaping, awnings -- often make the area seem attractive or unattractive, cluttered or charming.

But it is usually the big features that make the CBD exciting -- massive buildings in massive groups, long vistas, a dramatic skyline. They give a focal point to the entire urban area and are likely to determine the character of the central business district.

In some cities the objective is to create an atmosphere similar to that which is built into modern designed shopping centers. In others the emphasis is on distinctiveness. For instance, the Cleveland report points out that:

Cleveland is a northern industrial giant -- neither young nor old -- fronting a great inland sea. It cannot and should not assume the personality of some other type of city, but rather should magnify and celebrate those qualities which are native to it and which indeed make it "Cleveland."

The appearance of the Cleveland central business district, therefore, should reflect the city's industrial character. The topographic and architectural features of "visual significance," such as the industrial valley of the Cuyahoga River, visible from the edge of downtown, the steel and concrete bridges, and Terminal Tower, should be relied upon as "cornerstones for the program of downtown planning and development."

Palm Springs, California, on the other hand, is a resort city. An objective in exploiting its visual features would be to maintain in the CBD "an atmosphere of gaiety, fun, holiday."

San Francisco's downtown has three functional areas: financial, shopping, and hotel-entertainment. Objectives of appearance that augment its traits have been set up for each area. Thus the financial area, where the dominance of "important buildings . . . makes clear the role of finance in our economy and culture," displays "solidity, monumental and institutionalized" but should have more open space for more sun and fresh air. In the shopping area, the objective would be to get rid of the cluttered appearance and to create a pleasant environment, which is "more effective advertisement than any amount of individualouting [sic]." The entertainment area has neighborhoods of different types, but the appearance of each should help develop an over-all atmosphere of sophistication, glamor, or conviviality, as the case may be.

Minneapolis proposes an underlying goal relating to appearance and three specific goals. The underlying goal is: "In all matters of the design and
location of physical features in or relating to central Minneapolis, the
effects of such features on the appearance of the area should be taken into
account so as to create the most rewarding, stimulating, and memorable en-
vironment possible. The specific goals of appearance of the central busi-
ness district are:

1. It should be distinctive: Those aspects which can help to
clearly distinguish central Minneapolis from noncentral areas
and from other cities should be nurtured and developed.

2. It should have unity: The basic design and layout of cen-
tral Minneapolis should express the unity of the area as a whole
and of its major parts. A sense of order should underlie and
provide a framework for the great variety of functions and ac-
tivities which are wanted in the area.

3. It should have variety: Consistent with other stated ob-
jectives, the layout and details of central Minneapolis should
be such as to make it as interesting, surprising, alive, and
varied as possible.

Circulation

As the area of highest concentration of daytime population and the most in-
tensive land use, the central business district is also the area in most
cities that generates the most traffic. In this capacity, it is the hub of
a regional transportation network. In most cities, however, this character-
istic of the CBD produces effects that threaten to seriously reduce its
economic efficiency.

For this reason, improved circulation is one of the most important subsidi-
iary goals and one necessary to achieve the main goal of improved CBD eco-
nomic health. Without good circulation within the central business district,
programs to improve access to the area, to create an attractive environment,
and to retain or gain compactness are to some extent wasted effort.

Accessibility and circulation are interrelated in that both depend on an
efficient, integrated transportation system and an adequate terminal stor-
age system. As a practical matter, however, the two are often treated as
separate problems. Also, the central business district has pedestrian traf-
fic and internal vehicular traffic — both within the central business dis-
trict.

Central business district traffic is divided into four types: passenger
vehicles, trucks, pedestrians, and transit. The goal, as usually expressed
or implied, is (1) to separate the four types of traffic from each other
to the extent possible, and (2) to improve the circulation of all types of
traffic within each system.

Thus in San Francisco, the objectives of the suggested plan include this
one: "To provide a circulatory system that brings into balance mass trans-
it, private automobile, and pedestrian systems, avoiding so far as pos-
sible conflicts between these various street uses."
In Cleveland, it is pointed out that "a balanced transportation system is essential to the revitalization of downtown Cleveland. Concentration of business in downtown can therefore only be maintained if accessibility is increased through improvement of both freeway and mass transit facilities, by reduction of vehicular and pedestrian conflict both inside and adjacent to the 'core,' and by arrangement of more convenient parking facilities."

Needed in Chicago to achieve the goal of improved internal circulation for vehicles, pedestrians, and freight are (1) schemes to carry pedestrians from peripheral terminals to points within the central area; (2) separation of pedestrians and vehicles through several different levels of access; and (3) new methods of freight handling and distribution.

It is pointed out forthrightly in the Miami report that "once downtown, private vehicles and public carriers must not be bogged down in congestion. An adequate circulation system is needed to speed them to their terminal facilities." Regarding pedestrians, the statement is equally to the point: "Everyone going downtown ultimately becomes a pedestrian. Adequate facilities for comfortable pedestrian movement are a must."

In Cincinnati, it is observed that "the greater the concentration of people, the greater their dependence on pedestrian accessibility and pedestrian circulation. This plan endeavors to facilitate pedestrian circulation where it is needed most . . . in the core."

The goal in Tacoma is stated as "freedom of pedestrian movement in the core, unhindered by steep topography, vehicular traffic, or long blocks."

And in Seattle the goals of "internal circulation" include separation of pedestrian and vehicular movement, more convenient movement of pedestrians within the downtown district, exclusive or priority use of certain streets for internal and local transit, pedestrian ways that protect walkers from the weather, and separation of truck traffic from other vehicular traffic and from pedestrian traffic.

Improved pedestrian circulation in the central business district has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Many of the proposals have emphasized a pedestrian mall that would have the design features of shopping centers and the charm and convenience of European plazas. A pedestrian mall -- if economically feasible -- offers an opportunity to put into effect the goal of improved civic appearance.

Although a pedestrian mall can provide free pedestrian circulation and at the same time may improve city appearance, it would perhaps be premature to select it as the only solution or to base an entire plan for CBD improvement upon this single project -- valuable though it is for purposes of engaging public interest and for promotion. The danger is that in seizing on one idea, others that are just as valuable, though possibly less exciting, may never be discovered.

This report was prepared by Mary McLean, PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE.

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