THE PRESS, THE PUBLIC, AND PLANNING

An informed citizenry, it has often been said, is necessary to good government. As a principle, this statement is one to which all public officials subscribe. Yet there remains a question as to whether planning commissions and staffs have taken full advantage of the opportunities available to them to keep the public informed.

All would agree that effective communication between the public and government is essential to a successful planning program. And yet, communication between the public and the planning agency is rarely direct; in most cases, it takes place through the newspaper. The result is a three-way relationship that is both intricate and complex. This report examines that relationship.

Although a "how-to-do-it guide" for planning agencies seeking to obtain more space in their daily newspapers might prove useful, that is not the purpose of this report. Rather, it is designed to help pinpoint problems inherent in the relationship among the public, the press, and city planners. It may then be possible to find ways to ameliorate the problems if not completely solve them. With an understanding of the nature of the problems, planning officials should be better able to recognize and evaluate the courses of action open to them. At the very least, they should be able to avoid the difficulties and frictions that frequently develop when public officials meet the press.

It must be stressed at the outset that there are dangers inherent in any attempt to generalize about communication of this kind. On the one hand, the attitudes and abilities of reporters and editors that directly affect this three-way relationship vary greatly. Further, one newspaper's determination of what is news may differ markedly from another's. Newspaper policies and practices affect what the newsmen do, and each newspaper has its own policies and practices.

We may note that community attitudes, too, vary widely, and they differ on planning as well as on other matters of public interest. Community atti-

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tudes play a great part in how government operates, and help to shape the newspaper's coverage of those operations.

It is also difficult to generalize about planning agencies. First of all, their structure and staffing vary considerably. Each agency has set its own planning priorities, which directly affect the news it generates. (A downtown parking survey will probably get more headlines than a survey of water facilities needs.) And there is variety in ways that planning agencies have communicated with the people. While a few cities may boast that the people know about and generally support programs, their success in engaging public interest and citizen participation in a planning program varies widely.

In any discussion of a public information program, the interrelationships among the participant groups should be kept in mind. One planning director may find his every effort to inform the public frustrated by incompetent coverage or by reporting that skims the controversial cream from planning studies and leaves untouched the larger, more basic issues presented in the studies. Another may be satisfied that he gets "good space," not recognizing that what is being run is pure pap or, worse, that it is completely unintelligible to the public because it repeats the jargon to which only planners are privy.

And there have been occasions when planners and the press have combined to dig out the data and to present it clearly and concisely, only to have the public ignore them. There was one such attempt in a bedroom county near one of our large urban centers some years ago. When the series of articles was completed, the newspaper made concrete proposals aimed at dealing with the problems. But a meeting of editors with political leaders led to nothing, because the leaders (quite rightly) assessed the public reaction--no strong feelings one way or the other. A perfect mandate to maintain the status quo.

Thus, as we attempt to analyze each of the three segments of the communication process--the press, the public, and planning--it must be borne in mind that no complete separation is possible. We shall examine, in turn, the influence of the planning environment, the press environment, and the public opinion environment on the process of communicating through the press medium.

**THE PLANNING ENVIRONMENT**

In theory, the planning commission and staff stand back and take the long view. The professional planner, in particular, is supposed to be oriented toward the future.

But what is too often the practice? Today, the professional staff is pressed by demands for immediate solutions to the most trying urban and regional problems. This year's phase of the capital improvement program or the workable program, the rush to get some sort of zoning on the books (without a master plan) are the kinds of problems that tend to steer the planner away from the horizon. The problems divert his attention from tomorrow's generalities, and concentrate it on today's specifics. In the process, Robert A.
Walker's injunction that planning is "properly as broad as the scope of city government" is ignored (Walker, 1950).

Crisis planning, or the devising of quick, on-the-spot solutions, is not done without risks. Foremost among them is the risk inherent in setting today's priorities in the face of the likelihood that tomorrow's crisis will be even more acute. Should we stick to our programs once under way, or should we alter them? And, if we alter them, do we not have to obtain public approval when, presumably, the public has approved only the original proposals? Are not old wounds and antagonisms reopened, and do not opponents have another opportunity to contest, object, and delay? If the proposals are constantly changed, what happens to the broad base of community approval without which no progress can be made?

If crisis planning demands speed, there is much in our democratic institutions that actively operates against it. Legal requirements and safeguards impose delay; politics often demands it. This influence is demonstrated by a Fortune comment on a "monumental citizen planning effort" in Syracuse, New York, during World War II (Fortune, 1944). The magazine said:

Probably an ideally staffed planning organization could have started from scratch and come through with a fairly mapped out proposal for a master plan in six months--if the public were ignored. But to get a plan with a good chance of being carried out, the procedure is of necessity longer. Not to be overlooked in the time required, moreover, is the matter of personalities--stubbornness, preconceived ideas, and maybe pure cussedness, on the part of individuals and groups that must come to agreement.

Donald H. Webster touches on the relationship between "corrective planning" and public opinion this way (Webster, 1958):

The failure of the public to support certain policies for community betterment is often due to the fact that planning officials have failed to take the public into their confidence in the development of plans on which policy decisions are based. Unless the public has been kept informed during the time when policy is being formulated, it is seldom possible to create a favorable climate of public opinion sufficient to overcome pressures and combat opposition at the time the policy decision is to be made.

Experience clearly demonstrates that if planning procedures are to be effective in creating acceptance of policy decisions, they need to be developed through human interaction, understanding, and participative support. The success of the program requires that more attention be paid to people than to the mechanics of planning.

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1For complete information on the references given in the text, see the list at the end of this report.
The Role of the Planner

The planner is a central figure in the three-way relationship among the press, the public, and planning. At one level he is the expert. In most instances he is free to comment without reservation on the technical aspects of his work; the policy-making function belongs either to his planning board or to the executive officers of the local government. Yet the gap between technical expertise and policy-making in local government is not a big one, and one greatly influences the other.

We shall not spend much time discussing whether there is a need for planning agencies to inform the public about planning. Professional planners have argued long and loud among themselves about the propriety of their getting involved in "selling" plans and programs. This is a legitimate debate, and of course it is up to the planning officials and their superior elected and appointed officials to determine just how deeply they will become involved.

However, Bernard Rubin, a political scientist who studied the public relations activities of New York state agencies over a 12-year period, suggests that the argument may be settled by practice. He declares (Rubin, 1958):

At the very least, the public is a silent partner in every official undertaking. . . . Most of the supervisory officials in the state's services were aware that public understanding and cooperation were vital to the success of operations. Public relations is now an established function of government. While the effectiveness of programs varies from agency to agency, it is evident that the work is now accepted in official quarters as necessary. This recently formulated measure of agreement as to the usefulness of public relations may be one of the important administrative developments of our times.2

Rubin also deals with the argument that some things are just too technical for the public to understand.

One inescapable conclusion resulting directly from the . . . analysis of representative, broad-gauge public relations programs is that the burden of proof is incontestably on any administrator who claims that, because of the tremendously technical operations of his unit, public relations is an organized activity that meets no particular demand. Administrators who hold to that line of argument are either involved in some completely mechanical operation that is beyond general understanding or are unenlightened as to the full scope of their responsibilities.

It is obvious that some parts of planning are mechanical. Data-gathering

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2As observers of the public relations men have pointed out, the line between the true and the false, the person or the corporation and the likeness that is constructed in the "public unconscious," is often deliberately blurred. Rubin emphasizes that this kind of public relations has no place in government: "Governmental public relations must be based rigidly on the truth," and the public official responsible must be absolutely scrupulous.
techniques may follow standardized lines. But data-gathering is not where
the essence of planning lies. Rather, it lies in the ability of trained
people to digest, correlate, and utilize data; their ability first to come
up with a precise definition of the problem, and then to devise an achiev-
able and acceptable solution.

Finding an acceptable solution to urban problems depends, among other things,
on an accurate appraisal of community attitudes. It is well known that the
public tends to be imprecise about planning concepts. The "city beautiful"
concept of planning, for example, is still the ultimate in planning to many
people. To many others, "planning" and "zoning" mean the same thing.

And many newsmen don't know the difference either. It isn't enough to edu-
cate the reporter on the city hall beat. The copyreaders and editors must
be educated too. For example, a frequent headline appearing on stories about
zoning boards of adjustment will say: "Planners approve Variances." The
distinction between the jurisdictions of the planning commission and the
board of appeals in the field of zoning is unclear to the public because it
is unclear to newsmen.

The Planner's Attitude

Much of the reluctance to get involved in communications with the public
(apart from public appearances before civic groups) is probably an outgrowth
of the staff nature of planning. But it may also result from the planner's
unwillingness to get involved in dealing with the public.

One important reason is that the process is time-consuming. The size of
planning staffs as a rule has not kept up with the growth in the need for
planning, even though they have multiplied tremendously since 1950. With so
many things to do, it is easy for the planning director to give a low ranking
to the various activities that constitute informing the public.

It is probably fair to say that the dedicated professional planner believes
that his is one of the most important jobs in the community. This spirit
has given the profession drive and enthusiasm that have attracted young men
of vision. Yet this is not a unique feeling. The esprit de corps of sales-
men is boosted by their knowledge that industry would grind to a halt with-
out their efforts. Traffic managers know that the goods would not be there
to be sold if it weren't for them, and production managers know that both
salesmen and traffic managers would be out of jobs if there were nothing to
sell. It does not diminish the importance of the planner to recognize that
he is a member of a team in which the public is a partner.

It is easy to see how a man of ideas, working in an environment that demands
both speed and deliberation, can become irritated when things don't move
along. But in these circumstances the planner's most precious equipment is
his admiration and respect for the values of the democratic process. Whether
or not he and his agency are withdrawn from the rough-and-tumble of every-
day concern, the planner must recognize that life in government is life in
a goldfish bowl. Fortunately, most planners see this condition as more of
a challenge to their professionalism—to their public-service careers—than
all of the traffic snarls or depreciation of the tax base or industrial de-
velopment needs of their cities. They see this challenge as an opportunity to strengthen the democratic process itself. Whatever frustration they have is vented in seclusion.

This personal attitude is important in communication. It is surprising, though, that many public officials who are willing to sit down with a citizen who comes in off the street seeking information, or to speak to small groups, are unable to communicate with large numbers of people through the mass media available to them.

The planning official is the first link in the chain of communication that sends information about planning to the public. If he is unenthusiastic about conveying information, if he lets personal conflict with reporters blind him to the importance of the news medium, if he fails to make use of the communications opportunities open to him, then the link will be a weak one and the chain will break immediately.

The Governmental Structure

Even within the planning sphere, planners do not operate alone. Planning is an advisory function, and the decision-making function rests elsewhere. This fundamental fact about planning in the governmental structure should provide a mechanism for upward communication.

Communication is a two-way process. Too many planning agencies make the mistake of passing out information and thinking that it gets to the people. They are surprised, when the point of decision is reached, that the public displays no knowledge of the point at issue. There must be feedback if the planning agency is to know what people are thinking, and the elected officials and appointed members of advisory commissions should help provide it. The newspaper, through its editorials, also provides a reaction. This may be just the editor’s reaction, or it may speak for a large part of the community - it is hard to tell which.

The governmental structure is also important in this context because it means that many people besides the professional planner are justified in commenting about planning activity. The professional planner is not the only one to whom the reporter can turn. He may properly ask the councilmen, the executive, and the commission members.

It is important, therefore, that the planner be competent to say what he does say. He should not, for example, comment upon matters that properly belong to council (“We will change a law”) or the executive (“We have money for it”) or the commission (“We will recommend to council”). He may properly provide the reporter with all of the data and his interpretation of it. Yet he must not publicly challenge his superior elected or administrative officials in their policies.

A distinction must be made between advocating a point of view and presenting information to the community. This is an extremely delicate situation requiring the utmost in judgment. Yet there is every reason to believe that the planner can avoid policy pronouncements while instructing reporters and the public about the choices open to the community.
The Role of the Consultant

The position of the planning consultant is slightly different. When a newspaper seeks information directly from a consultant, he should in every case provide explanations of the technicalities of planning, and leave comments on the purposes of planning proposals to the planning commission members. One suburban township official announced with a great deal of fanfare that "floating" industrial zones would be included in the new zoning ordinance because they would attract industry to the residential community. It is better to have the public official make statements of this sort than the consultant, especially when the chamber of commerce industrial development committee knows from experience that industry is not going to move into the township as long as the tax base is lopsided.

The consultant usually recognizes that his prime responsibility is to the commission. The information he gathers and the recommendations he makes should go to the planning commission for their review and approval before submission to the public. Failure to clarify the matters on which the commission and the consultant should speak has often caused confusion. It has also led to charges of secrecy.

During the early stages, the planning commission should be fairly clear on the direction in which the community should be moving. The primary goal may be zoning rather than a master plan. It may be subdivision regulation rather than capital budgeting. But in any case the commission should know, both in long-range and short-range terms, where it hopes to go. This is, and always will be, the area in which only the commission member should speak. But with five, seven, or nine members, the board could easily go off in many directions without some unified (preferably written) policy.

Once the work of data-gathering begins, the reporter's attention will shift to the consultant. At this point, the consultant is perfectly free to serve as a technical spokesman on how the commission's policy might be put into operation. He should make it clear that he is speaking as a technician and that the decisions are up to the planning commission and to the governing body of the community. He should also be free to comment and describe the techniques that will be used to gather the information.

As the work nears completion, the consultant should avoid discussing his recommendations with the press. These are properly made to the commission. At this point, however, the planning commission should make every effort to set up machinery to get the recommendations to the public, by way of the press, as soon as possible after their presentation.

It is at this stage that the commission will be holding fairly frequent meetings with the consultant as he presents his data, and the individual commission members will be under pressure to talk. How they act has a lot to do with whether the press charges the planning commission with secrecy.

The consultant should be instructed to prepare sufficient copies for presentation to the press when the matter is submitted to the board. A lapse of time between such presentation and formal acceptance, even in cases other than those requiring public hearings, will permit the public to react to the proposals. This offers the opportunity for a wider expression about the policies and recommendations before the final action is taken.
"Know news. Know where to get it. Go get it."

These are the reporter's three basic rules. Like most rules, they take on meaning only as they are applied. It is no easy matter to determine what news is. It used to be enough for the reporter merely to record what someone said or did. Now, many newspapers recognize their responsibility not only to record, but also to present events so that a well-rounded picture emerges for the reader.

The conscientious reporter has a dual approach to the news. First of all, he comes as a witness, a spectator at meetings or press conferences. As such, he writes what he sees and hears. The second approach is that of interpreter. He does not record the proceedings stenographically, and carries back to the newspaper office in his notes only what seems important to him. There he tries to extract the significance of the event as well as describe it.

Both approaches are used in most news stories, although one usually predominates. An announcement of an urban renewal program may be handled merely as an announcement. Yet it may also be written to add perspective—it might include the area's crime trends, fire experience, welfare needs, and so on. Here the event is made whole by the reporter who draws on his own knowledge and the clippings in his newspaper's morgue.

There may be no event (no "today" angle) in a background or feature story. This kind of article may be merely a historical summary. It says, "This is where we are, and how we got here." An interpretive story will attempt to explain "why" and "where are we going?"

Meetings with the Press

There are three ways that planning officials get in touch with the press:

1. When the press seeks information from planning officials. This includes the periodic visits of the reporter making the rounds, and the less frequent occasions when reporters seek out planners and commission members for information or comments on a particular topic, as for a feature story. In these cases, the initiative lies with the press.

2. When the press functions primarily as an observer, as at commission meetings and hearings.

3. When the planning agency takes the initiative, as when it issues a press release or calls a press conference.

Unless the newspaper and its newsman are acutely sensitive to the need for planning, it is not likely that much planning news will develop as a result of the newspaper's initiative. Routine beat coverage will not uncover the significance of the changes that are transforming our communities. The
planning-conscious newspaper, on the other hand, will seek out the significant. Many have already; they have run series designed to awaken their readers and "blockbusters"—single-page spreads—that have a shock effect.

But, all in all, the reporter's day-by-day visits to the planning agency tend to be unproductive of news, at least when compared with other departments. The public works department is always building a new street; the traffic engineer is always posting detours or installing new traffic systems; the inspection agencies, the police and fire departments, all have something to report each day. It is the rare planning agency that provides a continuous stream of "news" to the newspaper.

Meetings are very productive. Here the reporter obtains information about how someone wants his zoning changed, about a new subdivision submitted for approval, and about all the many kinds of items that routinely fall to the planning commission and staff to review. But only when there is a fight does this kind of news make big headlines. Rarely does news coverage of meetings contribute anything of lasting value to the public's comprehension of their urban problems.

The "big" planning stories are those initiated by the planning agency: the release of a report, the unveiling of a model, the announcement of a program. Often there is a lot of "hoopla" connected with these. A report is formally turned over to the mayor. The chamber of commerce president is on hand to support city efforts to rebuild the downtown area. Traffic club officers are there to praise the new traffic plan.

Such "hoopla" serves a valuable purpose. It provides the "today" element in what is not essentially a "today" story. (The report could be made at any time, the unveiling could be done tomorrow as well as today.) However, the assemblage of local dignitaries and officials provides an atmosphere that tends to generate more enthusiasm than would be the case if the planning director merely explained the project or turned the report over to the newsmen.

**Working with the Press**

It is important for the planning official to know how these various occasions can be utilized effectively to inform the public. He should recognize that the newspaper's operating conditions have a great deal to do with how a newspaper will handle a given story in a specific set of circumstances. We shall touch upon the major ones.

In recent years there has been a marked reduction in the number of daily newspapers. Many cities now have but one newspaper, or two papers under single ownership.

Where a reporter from one newspaper is the only one with whom planning officials deal, the public spokesman avoids the cross fire of several reporters all after the same story. Where there is newspaper competition, the planning officials—and the professional planner particularly—must try to avoid being caught in the middle.

In either event, there are several important rules to follow:

May 1960
--Be considerate of the reporter's problems. Learn what he needs in the way of information, and then volunteer it. Remember his deadlines.

--Be available. Don't complain when he seeks you out for the right information. You'll be worse off if he doesn't.

--Be cordial. A friendly demeanor never hurt anyone. You may have your differences with the gentlemen of the press, but you're in trouble if you let those differences get under your skin.

--Be broadminded. Overlook the unimportant errors in the paper. Seek the retraction, where absolutely necessary, with acceptance of the fact that "anyone can make a mistake."

--Be fair. Be impartial in releasing news. Spread the announcement around among competing newspapers if you can. If not, make it a formal policy to release information as soon as possible, when it happens. Don't favor one paper over another.

--Be discreet. When one reporter, on his own initiative, asks you something, don't call another and tell him what his competition is working on.

--Be informal. Formality restricts the reporter. Don't issue a press release when you can tell him personally. Use press conferences sparingly, and only for major announcements. Then keep them relaxed.

Because planning reports tend to be voluminous and the programs and projects quite complicated, it is often advisable to give the information to the newspapers several days in advance of the "official" event. This practice should be encouraged wherever possible, but again there must be a clear understanding about the circumstances under which the report is to be released for publication.

In a competitive situation, it is not always possible to work out such arrangements, and the report or announcement must be held until the event. In such a case, every effort should be made to prepare a summary containing all of the essential elements (in the form of a fact sheet or press release) so that the reporter may write his story without having to read the entire report. This is especially important near deadline time. Each "event" of this kind should provide an opportunity for the reporters to question those participating. Even when they know all the details of the program or report, reporters want to get comments. Quotes tend to brighten up a story.

Timing. One of the most important features of communication is timing. It has various aspects.

First of all, there are the conditions of timing imposed by the mechanical operations of the newspaper. These are reflected in deadlines, which planners should always consider when releasing information to the press. Here are some things to remember:
--Hold press conferences at least two hours before the first edition deadline. The reporter needs time to write his story.

--Release a planning report at least four hours before the first edition time. The more time the reporter has to digest it, the better the story will be.

--If you hope to have the newspaper use charts or other illustrations, give them to the paper well enough in advance for the cuts to be made. On papers with their own facilities, this may take up to four hours. On small dailies and weeklies, it may take as long as three days.

A second aspect of timing concerns incidents related to the planning work. For example, it can be assumed that a report on water resources would be especially timely in August in a town that has restrictions on lawn sprinkling. Opportunities for timeliness like these are rare, but planning officials should be aware of them when they do appear. Always say to yourself, "What are people interested in, and how does planning affect it?"

Finally, don't think that planning is always news. Editors must evaluate it each day, along with hundreds of other stories gathered locally or supplied by the wire services. Sometimes even the "hoopla" event loses the race for space to a major occurrence such as a disaster. Competition from some events can be avoided, however. Think ahead. Unless the announcement is particularly pertinent, don't make it during the World Series.

Observing the Newspaper's Policies. Newspapers have many policies that affect coverage. As a news source, planning officials should learn those policies. For example, many big-city dailies keep the length of stories to a minimum in order to get more stories in the available space. This is particularly true of afternoon papers. Even the most important national and international news may get no more than a dozen paragraphs. The second-level stories (most planning stories fall in this category) may have to be told in five or six paragraphs. Obviously, little more than the bare statement of the "event" is included, and the technical and legal aspects are ignored. A daily in a medium-sized city, on the other hand, may treat "local" news with more respect, and give planning stories of a routine nature a relatively big play.

Some newspapers may prefer the feature-story approach to the more involved subjects. Planners should encourage this as much as possible, because such treatment frames the issues more clearly for the reader.

Not strictly a policy, but an influence nevertheless, is the size of a newspaper on a given day. Some days, space is at a premium; at other times (Thursday afternoon and Friday morning editions, for example), the editorial department has extra space to fill. Recognizing these policies and influences will help you time your announcements so that circumstances are favorable to good coverage.

The Planning Agency as a Source of News

Many people in our capitals, court houses, and city halls are news sources,
but those connected with planning agencies are perhaps the most fortunate. Despite whatever bad moments they have had with the press, planners as a group rate fairly high with reporters, editors, and publishers. There are several reasons for this:

1. Planning organizations are seldom tainted by suspicions that (rightly or wrongly) underlie press attitudes toward local government. This is due perhaps to planning's comparative newness in most cities. On the whole, planning agencies have not become havens for patronage seekers, even where partisanship is high. They generally have a high proportion of professionals on their staffs, and unless there is personal antagonism, the reporter is likely to take the planner's word when he says something related to planning.

2. Newspapers tend to support planning in principle. They are concerned with the problems that planning must deal with in a crisis environment. This helps to create a relaxed climate, which can tighten up quickly if a specific proposal comes under newspaper attack.

3. The nature of planning is such that many of the influences leading to friction in other departments are not present. There is little in the day-to-day routine that raises the issue of secrecy, the most sensitive area between the press and government. Planning work can be divided into three phases: data gathering, analysis, and recommendations. Few planning agencies feel required to hold back raw data, and the press rarely tries hard to obtain it, knowing that by itself it will have little meaning. Analysis is not a pressing problem either, because it is easily seen that the planning staff has the right to take all the time necessary to do the job. The press does not attempt to force the planner into determining what the data mean before he is ready to do so.

As the recommendation stage nears, the pressure may increase. But unless reporters have gotten wind that something big is brewing, or they are competing for the same story, they usually recognize that the professional staff has a right to place the information before its chief executive or planning commission before it is made public. (There is less tendency to "leak" information about normal activities because the source of technical data is usually evident.)

Secrecy. Yet the planning official--professional and board member alike--cannot be careless about procedures. If the planning commission tends to hold frequent executive or closed sessions, there is bound to be conflict on the "right to know" issue.

Executive sessions of the commission can be justified only when personnel matters or purchase of land are being discussed. It may be possible to work out an arrangement by which reporters can attend the meeting on an off-the-record basis. However, this arrangement is not likely to work unless there is a clear understanding about who will say when the information may be used, and
under what conditions. Such arrangements tend to be in jeopardy too, when one reporter assents and then finds his hands tied while his competition digs the story out from other sources.

In any case, planning officials should work to gain a reputation among reporters for being forthright. This means not only that they answer questions correctly and fully, but also that they communicate a positive attitude toward distributing news—one that results in the release of information as soon as possible.

More often than not, conflict between the planning agency and the press stems from real or imagined failures of one or the other. An analysis of the conflicts between the two would show a majority of occasions in which the frictions stem from how something was carried out, not from what the agency was trying to do.

A good illustration concerns the renewal program in a large Eastern city. This city made it a practice to condemn first and then negotiate. But before filing condemnation proceedings, it delivered notices by hand explaining the forthcoming action and the reasons for it. On one occasion, the day of delivery was windy, and many of the notices were blown off porches. So, although the papers had carried many stories about the forthcoming renewal project, the first specific information many home owners received came in the form of court notices. The newspapers, although overwhelmingly in favor of the project, took the agency to task for what it considered highhanded tactics.

Rapport. It is a goal of press relations to establish rapport with the newsmen. This involves the happy situation in which both the planner and the reporter talk the same language, generally agree on what would be good for the community, and are optimistic as to the possibilities of accomplishing it. Yet there is a danger of getting too close. Indeed, when there is harmony for a long time, the chances of some minor irritant being blown up are somewhat increased.

Furthermore, there is a danger that a reporter will get so close to the planning agency, its jargon, its technicalities, and its complexities, that he forgets that he must write for his readers, not for other planners. Anthony Lewis, a reporter for the New York Times, recently described how this can happen (Lewis, 1960):

The newspaper tradition is very much against becoming a short-term expert on anything. In the past, at least, the reporter was expected to be a jack of all trades and master of none. One reason for this may be the well-founded fear that the more one learns about a subject, the harder it is to write a good simple story about it. Every sentence you put down cries out for qualification—and there is no space for qualification. I am sure you all know how much easier it is for the visiting correspondent to write the complete story of Soviet Russia today in 1,000 words after he has been there a week than it would be if he stayed a year. In the same way, newspapers tend to present all issues in blacks and whites. . . . I think the two qualities . . . -- the drive to master each subject as it comes along, and the ability to see problems in all their complexities, not in black and white--are needed.
on newspapers, and I think, hopefully, that the trend is in that direction.

Keeping the Reporter Informed. If the planner is the first link in the chain of communication, the reporter is the second. Editors are important too, but it is the reporter's ability to grasp proposals, methods, and goals that determines what appears in the newspaper. There is one sure sign when this link is inoperative—the reporter acts only as a witness, and gives no interpretation. He deals with the day-to-day, not with the "where are we now and where are we going?"

It is essential that the planner transmit information to the reporter in such a way that he at least has an inkling of what it is about. For example, a redevelopment agency announced with fanfare that an area had been declared blighted. As data were accumulated over a period of months, several minor changes were made in informal sessions. A year later, when the final program was to be submitted to the Urban Renewal Administration in Washington, the reporter learned that two blocks of homes had been added to the demolition area and two others omitted. The changes meant, the reporter realized to his chagrin, that some 20 families expecting the bulldozers would not be moved and that some 85 who had breathed easier for having escaped were now inside the demolition area. In this case, the reporter had not been deceived. Excellent rapport existed, but the reporter's friends in the agency simply had not thought of the news value of the changes.

Keep the reporter informed. Encourage him to prepare the "situation" or background story. Remember, he is important. Mr. Lewis explains why:

News stories are much more significant in shaping public opinion than editorials. Even editors will admit this, perhaps because the readership surveys show that only a small portion of the subscribers ever reads the editorial page. And in my experience the reporter has very much more to do with the shape of the news story than the editor does. For the Washington correspondent, editors are a group of anonymous people at the other end of a telegraph wire. Of course they retain their power to cut the point out of a story. But usually this is done by inadvertence, because of the demands for space, rather than by design. The real decisions--what facts to report, and in what light to report them--are made by reporters, in my opinion.

Obviously, the newspaper's attitudes toward planning and what the planning agency is doing play a crucial part in determining what it prints. But it is obvious that no matter how good the coverage, no matter how willing the newspaper to cooperate, much depends on how the planning agency spokesman performs his press relations activities.

If the press is unaware of the legal framework for planning in that state, it is the planner who must inform him of what the planning agency may legally do. When newsmen are unfamiliar with the mechanics of planning, it is the planner who must explain how and why land-use studies are made. If reporters are unconcerned about the philosophy of planning, it is the planner who has the opportunity to explain that philosophy and show how it affects his work.
Primary communication between the planning official and the reporter must be free of entanglements. For example, the planner who uses jargon with the reporter will inevitably find that jargon getting into the press. It contributes nothing to planning. If the planner thinks in abstract terms, of people as numbers, then he will lose the opportunity to explain the impact of a program on people as individuals. If he tends to get tangled in verbiage, he loses the impact of conciseness.

However, these are primary problems of communication that are easily solved when the planner develops a knack for looking at his own activities from the outside. With a little practice, he can eliminate jargon, he can think in terms of people, and he can be concise.

But there remains the question of whether planners are getting the most informational impact out of the material they have at hand. Planning agency files contain a wealth of information. There are population studies showing age groups, sex groups, and employment distribution. There are land-use studies, sometimes with sufficient information to indicate trends in land use (contracting CBD, for example). All of these data may be used to draw conclusions about changes in community environment and progress toward its goals.

These may be tentative conclusions, but at least the planner can raise the point as to what the city's present juvenile delinquency rate will mean when there are twice as many juveniles; he can properly ask whether the city should continue to provide services outside its limits when its data show limited capital resources and rising capital demands within them; he can suggest that there may be pressing demands for institutional services when his data show conditions conducive to social tension. These are all advance stories that could serve to inform the public of urban trends and the need to take action now.

Planning agencies whose jurisdictions are outside the central city have special problems in their press relations. A regional or metropolitan agency, for instance, may have no direct administrative connection with a local government. Often, county government agencies are not covered by reporters as intensively as city government agencies, even when the court house and city hall are but a block apart.

If planning is new to cities, it is even newer to counties. Newspapers usually staff their beats on an "area" basis: city government, county government, and the like. The county government reporter, in a community just starting county planning, may have to be educated in planning as he covers the new agency. If he is used to dealing with the "witness" type of story, he may not understand the abstract concepts of planning unless the planning agency makes an effort to explain the significance of what it produces.

On the other hand, the county planning agency whose offices are in the central city may find that only the central city daily paper gets in touch with it regularly. As far as outlying daily or weekly papers are concerned, county planning may not exist. The planning agency should provide these papers with information about how their segments of the county are affected by data-gathering activities and planning recommendations. What this means is that you don't write one single press release for the central city daily, the satellite town daily, and the rural village weekly. Instead, write three, and pack each with
so much "local" information that the paper wants to use it.

The planning agency in a suburban community has another kind of problem. It may not have a "home town" paper, and the central city daily may be only mildly interested in providing coverage. There may be no permanent staff, and instead, consultants are doing the basic work. In such a situation, the planning commission could well consider the use of direct contact with the people, through pamphlets and speeches to local organizations.

THE PUBLIC OPINION ENVIRONMENT

All public officials are perplexed, at one time or another, by the workings of public opinion. Many would agree with Mayor Edward C. Harns, Jr., mayor of Springfield, Oregon, who recently said (Harns, 1960):

To a nation steeped in the philosophy of business, it is sometimes a hard fact to accept [that] while our customers may always be the final authority, they are not always right. . . .

They are wrong, first of all in their attitude to city government generally. How is it and why is it that city government alone of all enterprises (public and private) is judged by citizens so often, not by what it does, but as good or bad solely on how little or how much it spends? Typical citizen comment--If Patrick Henry though taxation without representation was bad, he should see it WITH representation.

The average citizen regards his city government as at the worst, corrupt, at the best, inefficient. He is, in short, suspicious of his city government.

This is just one manifestation of what has been called the "either...or" dichotomy in public opinion--the tendency to see things as either black or white and to ignore the possibilities or shades of meaning in between. This tendency of the reader contributes to the attitude of the press although, as Mr. Lewis has pointed out, it is in many instances trying to overcome it. However, the planning official should recognize that he is more likely to get the public to participate when he can present a clear-cut choice.

Public Indifference

The average citizen tends to be indifferent toward local government. After a project is completed, it joins the community's achievements he points to with pride. But during the early stages he is either indifferent or skeptical.

One morning a newspaper in a medium-sized community carried pictures and stories about the town's first renewal program. In a conversation overheard that day, a middle-aged man told his younger companion: "The Fifth Ward's been that way since I was a boy. Every spring the newspaper goes down there and takes pictures of the horrible conditions. But nothing ever gets changed. I won't see
any change in my lifetime, and you won't either." The other man nodded his head in agreement.

Hostility comes in other forms. The big visible projects tend to run into objections because individuals feel no personal need for them. For example, a housewife talks to the mayor for a half hour, objecting to a proposed outlay for a special downtown study. She asks: "Why should we pay $35,000 to help the department stores? I go in them, they never have what I want. The clerks never wait on me, or they're rude. Why should my taxes go to help them?" Of course, the mayor's careful explanation of the importance of the downtown area to the community's tax base makes no impression.

The leadership of elected officials becomes most difficult when some people feel a strong need for new things, and others oppose them just as strongly because they feel no personal involvement.

**Pressure Groups**

When the process of setting priorities is important, and the demands exceed the community's resources, pressure groups frequently arise to advocate various programs and argue their merits. The vocal business community is a good example. Downtown renewal, or parking facilities, or transportation planning will get a lion's share of attention from the vocal sections of the public. In such a situation, it is likely that the local newspaper will be highly sympathetic to downtown programs. This interest arises partly because newspaper plants are commonly located in the CBD. Most newspapers, along with other downtown businesses, therefore have an interest in the welfare of the CBD.

Goals of pressure groups tend to be fixed and narrow. A new civic center, a new industry, a pedestrian mall, a recreation center, a swimming pool, zoning that keeps undesirables put--"Give us this one thing and the community is saved, its problems solved," the interest groups say in behalf of their pet project.

The role of pressure groups in democratic government has not been clearly defined. Studies of their behavior on the American political scene have tended to emphasize their negative characteristics. That is, their purpose is merely to prevent some widely beneficial action by government, or to acquire some advantage for themselves that is harmful to the community at large. However, it may be possible to suggest that--on a local level at least--pressure groups often operate today to advance proposals that would benefit the community at large. Again, the problem is to set priorities.

There is one basic problem in pressure group activity that still remains at the local level. This is the nonparticipation of a large number of people who do not identify themselves with pressure groups. Consequently, they may not see the advantages of a program to them personally, and therefore do not realize the community-wide benefits. It is these people who do not seem concerned with the outcome of decision-making, who are not alert to the direction in which their community is moving to meet the crises.

Not only is there an absence of identity between the pressure groups and general "public opinion," but there are also possible issues on which public opinion never forms. Many problems are so technical that a decision involves complicated choices in combination--not a simple "yes" or "no." Very often
community leaders despair of obtaining community approval during the formative planning period, and prefer instead to develop a package and let contending pressure groups fight over it. C. Wright Mills has observed (Mills, 1951):

It might be thought that our inherited standard of political alertness is too high, that only in crises can it be achieved. But this does not confront the problem at its true level, and lacks an adequate conception of "crisis." Crises have involved the publicity of alternatives, usually forced alternatives. But what if the authorities face and choose alternatives without publicity? In a system of power as centralized as ours, "crises" in the old-fashioned sense occur only when something slips, when there is a leak; in the meantime, decisions of vital consequence are made behind our backs. The meaning of crisis has to be made clear before it can be hopefully asserted that political alienation will be replaced by alertness only in crises. For today there are crises not publicized for popular political decision but which carry much larger consequences than many publicized crises of the past.

It would seem that publicity is necessary if we are to have adequate public participation in the decision-making. But, insofar as planning is concerned, such participation is essential during the planning process, for the community goals represent a first-order decision from which other decisions follow.

Community Pride

One attitude that directly affects a planning program is the tendency for people in some communities, both in government and out, to see the good rather than the bad in their community. Indeed, a reading of introductions to planning reports from these communities leaves the impression that they say, "While our problems are important, and they must be solved, all in all, we aren't so bad off."

One reason for the overdeveloped Pollyanna complex is the difficulty of relating the experience of other cities to our own, and impressing the people with the need to solve the problem (which overwhelmed another city) before it overwhelms us. For example, in one city the CBD stood unchallenged for many years. Even while a huge shopping center was being erected on the edge of town, the downtown businessmen continued to expect their customers to be "loyal" and, after a brief spurt of interest, to return downtown. They ignored what had happened in countless other cities. A year after the shopping center opened, vacant storefronts showed that downtown was missing about 10 per cent of its "front teeth." Only then could the planning agency speak in realistic terms about the downtown weakness. Had it done so previously, every businessman would have been irritated and upset.

Urban problems today require that the planner take a cold hard look at the community before anything is done. If he gets wrapped up in the untested clichés of the townspeople, the basis of his planning is shaky and his ability to present the problems in their proper seriousness may be undermined. Just how proud can the railroad junction town be in an era of growing highway use?
How important is it to have a "quality labor force" when, typically, an industry moving into town will need fewer employees than it did in its previous obsolete and unautomatized plant? How important is it to save old buildings, even those of slight historic interest, when the downtown area cries out for modernization to justify its existence economically?

Unfortunately, these questions are often resolved by compromises that satisfy without necessarily being satisfying solutions. For example, an Eastern city highly conscious of its colonial history must have a new public building. The functional demands are such that it must be long and low, but there are other demands that it be in keeping with history. Therefore, the city constructs a long, low, red brick building with small windows and white shutters. The result is modern colonial, with the disadvantages of both modern and colonial, and the advantages of neither.

CONCLUSIONS

The planner must recognize his central position in the interrelationships among the press, the public, and city planning. As the first link in the chain of communication with the public, he must first improve his press relations. In mechanical terms, this means he will provide complete and speedy distribution of news, establish machinery and policies designed to improve news flow, and pay attention to the timing of press conferences, press releases, and public events. These mechanical problems are solved relatively easily by the planner who conditions himself to think in terms of the needs of the press as it approaches the planning story.

However, there is another level of press relations. This is the level at which the newsman is drawn into the planning process: first, as a kind of feedback mechanism in which the planning agency learns something about the prevailing community sentiment; next, as the second link in the communication emanating from the planning agency. To be an effective "second link," it is essential that the reporter know enough about planning and the specific plans proposed to be able to provide a whole picture of the issues and the decisions.

This kind of education also requires that the reporter be given an expanding concept of the nature of planning. While there is no way around crisis planning and the "things" that result from an emphasis on physical planning, it may nevertheless be possible for the newspaper to direct public attention to the other issues that someday will press for solution, and can best be prepared for now. This involves broadening the planning agency's attention if it has become so preoccupied with today, tomorrow, and next week that it forgets next year.

Achievement of a balance in planning is something that planners should stress to officials, in whom the power of decision rests. Public officials should be encouraged to help draw the public into the processes of determining community goals, which is another way of setting community priorities.
REFERENCES

Fortune, January 1944. "So You're Going to Plan a City." Courtesy of Fortune magazine.


