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Planning with Large Institutions

PLANNING TOOLS

MOST CITIES HAVE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND CONCENTRATIONS of medical care. By virtue of their structure, scale, and location, they always seem to be in a growth mode. This expansion transforms their surroundings, creating a variety of urban planning and design challenges. Embedded in the notion of "anchor institution" is a general recognition that these concentrations of employment, intellectual, and financial capital can and should have a major role in the redevelopment of their neighborhoods.

Health care and education are two of the fastest growing economic markets in the U.S. These sectors have propped up job markets in many regions, especially cities hit hard by the effects of globalization and the general collapse of the manufacturing sector. Urban planning and design lessons can be found by looking at instances where universities, hospitals and—in some cases both of them together—have been directly responsible for positively influencing the growth of their downtowns.

The challenge of planning for medical institutions

For generations, the dominant growth paradigm for institutions was to acquire land contiguous to their campus and land-bank it. This strategy had the effect of providing institutions some assurance of a particular growth trajectory, but it frequently destabilized their surroundings. The dynamic proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy; each expansion broadened the influence of disinvestment and exacerbated the magnitude of the surrounding erosion.

Too often institutions built large parking facilities that created a fortress-like perimeter to their campus. In other cases, the institutions grew into neighborhoods and thereby expanded an institutional use into a residential area. Other impacts included minimal street life, especially at night, which made the boundaries between the institution and its surrounding area feel underpopulated and unsafe. Large swaths of vacant land awaiting development increased concerns for safety and vitality. Some communities came to feel these large institutions provided needed services, but did not act as good neighbors.

Institutions have come to recognize that they must plan in concert with their neighbors. Doing so not only creates a better business model, but it also creates better communities. Serving as a catalyst for the benefit of adjoining neighborhoods—not simply remaining defensive against them—places hospitals and universities in a unique position to significantly shape their surroundings.

While there is a general recognition that institutions have a vital role to play in society, expansion plans can encounter substantial resistance. Development tensions are commonplace; a broad spectrum of actors competes for goals that are often in direct conflict. For example, as institutions identify opportunities for expansion, they seek sites large enough to accommodate their program needs. Conversely, adjoining communities strive to preserve their existing character and resist impending encroachment. Scale juxtapositions between on- and off-campus environs can often be severe, as the program requirements for contemporary health care spaces dwarf the fine

The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus has doubled its footprint since 2001, resulting in over $1 billion in new campus development over the last decade.

PHOTO BY DAVID GAMBLE

Density in its core rather than expansion outward has been key to the success of the BNMC and helped to improve the edges it shares with its neighbors.

PHOTO BY DAVID GAMBLE

physical grain of neighborhood fabric. Hospitals, in particular, tend to be insular entities, and what public open space there is tends to be residual in nature. It is not surprising that conflicts between institutions and neighborhoods arise.

Transformations in health care delivery and the pressures to meet exceptional quality of care require that institutions constantly evaluate their planning and construction goals. At the same time, communities strive for vibrant neighborhoods and lively street life in downtowns. Itemizing the growth needs of a hospital for the short or long term is generally a difficult endeavor.

Developing an expansion plan for a complex is even more elusive. In instances where multiple institutions constitute a consortium, each member has its own facility master plan. These are often created independently of one another as each organization seeks to leverage its own intrinsic advantages of proximity and place.

There are pitfalls for individual developments that are built in the wrong location, at the wrong time, and in a density that diminishes the possibility for future linkages and partnerships. Individual projects planned in isolation can easily siphon away opportunities to enhance the open space networks or other shared amenities and isolate partner institutions. The patchwork of property ownership also makes connections between institutions difficult, even as the need for "coatless connections" of medical centers requires coordination. Aligning and reconciling individual plans is an early and necessary endeavor, as is the need to understand the community's planning goals.

Case study:
Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus

It is at the confluence of medicine, education, and research—Buffalo, New York's new economies—where the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus has emerged as a major player in the national health care scene. The 120-acre campus is situated between the neighborhoods of Allentown and the Fruit Belt; the eastern edge is defined by Main Street, where the region's solitary light-rail line connects the downtown and waterfront to the University of Buffalo North Campus.

Medical and academic institutions parallel to Main Street shared the territory for over a century with little semblance of a common identity or campus. This changed in 2001, when a consortium of hospitals and research institutes joined forces to brand themselves as a medical campus. They did so to compete nationally and provide a higher quality of care, but also to form a cohesive urban district connected to its adjoining neighborhoods.

Between 2001 and 2015, BNMC invested more than $1 billion in shared structures and open space design. The consortium matured into the Academic Health Center, which recently attracted the University of Buffalo's medical school to the downtown campus. A master plan framework aligned each individual institution with the campus as a whole, and synchronized the campus plan within the context of Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan.

The urban design framework of the master plan established an armature for new development that consolidated each institution's presence while reinforcing a collective identity that would grow over time. A planned single axis in the center of campus consolidates the institutions while alleviating pressures on the edges shared with the neighborhoods. This primary urban design intervention—a new linear park—brought together the existing and future institutions along a new open space.

—David Gamble, AICP, AIA, LEED AP

Gamble is the principal of Gamble Associates in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A version of this article will appear in his forthcoming book, Rebuilding the American City.

'Experts often possess more data than judgment.'

—COLIN POWELL
RETIRED FOUR-STAR GENERAL
AND FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE

PART TWO OF A TWO-PART SERIES: DATA FOR COMMISSIONERS

Using Planning Data Wisely

BEST PRACTICES

IN PART ONE OF THIS SERIES, WE EXAMINED THE FRAMEWORK FOR thinking about data. In part two, we provide practical advice about how planning commissioners can improve the way information is developed, interpreted, and presented in local discussions of planning issues.

Technicians versus decision makers

You are a planning commissioner—a decision maker. Your job is to make good choices about development in your community. "Good" depends on the specifics, but it is always about efficiency—which is getting a high ratio of desired outcomes relative to costs—and equity, which is distributing the benefits and costs fairly.

How will you know about the possible and likely benefits and costs of some action? First, someone has to define what benefits and costs matter, and their relative importance. Not all benefits and costs are equally important to all decision makers. Defining what things matter, and how much your community cares about those things, is a policy decision often expressed as goals in a plan. The policy goals are adopted by that community's officials. In the context of local planning, for example, this means adoption by a city council or planning commission.

Second, you need to acquire some information about the benefits and costs deemed important. Gathering, aggregating, analyzing, and reporting that data is usually the job of a planner, engineer, policy analyst, or other technicians, who work on behalf of decision makers. They can be either staff or consultants.

Keeping these two roles clear—collecting and processing data versus using that data to make decisions—is critical to making good decisions efficiently. Certainly, many planning commissioners have strong technical experience and skills, and good technicians do evaluations that lead to recommendations about policy. All planners are trained to assemble and evaluate data, while decision makers have the ultimate responsibility of considering all kinds of information—not just the data analysis of technicians—when weighing trade-offs across policy choices.

The conclusion here is that planning commissioners should approach data as its users, not its creators. They have an obligation to make sure the things that matter get measured by someone, but not to do the measurement themselves. Commissioners need to understand the needs, possibilities, and limitations related to data, but they do not have to know all the details of how to find, assemble, and evaluate it: That's what the planning staff does for them.

Pointing planners to the proper path

'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

—ALBERT EINSTEIN, PHYSICIST

START WITH THE BROAD GOALS AND WORK DOWN.

GET PAST THE RHETORIC about your jurisdiction's unique values and recognize that all local governments have the same basic goals and principles: economic prosperity, environmental quality, urban amenity, efficient public services, and a fair system for providing and charging for services. If those goals are not already consolidated in a strategic, land-use, or comprehensive plan, planners can infer them from other policy documents.

STAYING AT THE GOAL LEVEL, however, is almost useless for policy making. At that level, to paraphrase W. Edwards Deming, everything is just opinion, and will remain that way without data (e.g., "I'm voting for Policy X because I think it will be better for economic development than Policy Y").

EVALUATION REQUIRES ANALYSIS. The breaking down and specification of objectives and data. It requires definition (e.g., How do you define economic development?) and those definitions will always imply certain types of measurements. Getting to a rigorous specification that leads from broad goals and principles to objectives, to important types of impacts such as benefits and costs, to evaluation criteria and performance measurements, and finally to data, is hard work. Make your planners do it.

SPECIFY THE POLICY ISSUE you are addressing in the context of the goals, criteria, and measurements you have already established. This will cover most of what you need for decision making. The specifics of the issue may lead to suggestions about different kinds of measurements; it is unlikely to lead to different goals.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES of measurement, and set your sights on a level of data appropriate to the issue and your jurisdiction.

NARROW THE LIST OF MEASUREMENTS. With creativity, skill, and training, anyone can create a list of possible measures potentially relevant to any planning issue. Go ahead and start with the long list, but the long list has to become a short list to be useful. Pare it by considering the relevance, overlap, availability (and at what cost), and quality.

STANDARDIZE STAFF REPORTING based on the measurement framework. Data should measure impacts on agreed-upon goals. For complicated questions, there is a lot of staff work. But the com-

mission should require that, whatever the length of the full documentation, it be summarized in a standardized format of two to six pages.

Realistic expectations

'If you torture the data long enough, nature will always confess.'

—RONALD COASE,
NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING ECONOMIST

DATA IS LIKE A FRACTAL:
Every level of evaluation leads to a new and equally complex level of questions. More detail is always available; the question is whether it adds enough to be worth incorporating.

It can be time-consuming and expensive to collect additional data, but there is more to the decision than that. At some point, more data does not help decision making. Not only can data become too vast to grasp and discuss, but its unending pursuit can inadvertently or purposely delay critical decisions.

Ultimately, planning commissioners are responsible for evaluating the evaluation they receive from staff. Getting staff evaluations in a logical, standardized format that ties measurements to goals will help. But often data is not simple and observable; it simulates future conditions based on relatively complex models. A typical planner complaint about decision makers: "They want it comprehensive and complete, and on one page in 15 minutes."

There are at least a couple solutions. First, your commission may have one person with the interest, time, and expertise to get into the black box with planning staff and then report back to the commission. Second, if you are not testing the models, test the modelers. Modelers may perceive decision makers' questions to be scattered, but that may be how those decision makers evaluate the model: Does this person answer my questions clearly? Do I trust her? If so, then I can be more comfortable with the model results.

As difficult as the specification and compilation of measurements can be, the real political challenge is weighing their relative importance. Performance-based evaluation is easily gamed: One can, for example, measure the most important impact several ways to implicitly give it more weight.

As difficult as the specification and compilation of measurements can be, the real political challenge is weighing their relative importance.

Weighting is clearly a job for decision makers, informed by the opinions of stakeholders, the public, and staff analysts. As a commissioner, you have to make normative decisions on behalf of the citizens you represent. That's why you are there. The data help you make and explain those decisions, but they don't make the decisions for you.

—Terry Moore, FAICP; Alexandra Reese; and Ali Danko

Moore, a consultant, helped create ECONorthwest, which provides professional economics, planning, and financial consulting services. Reese is an associate and Danko is an economic analyst for the firm.

Measures

Some of the technical difficulties in developing performance measures:

SUBJECT OF THE MEASURE.
What is the precise focus? What level of detail will be addressed? Is it the entire subject or a subset of the subject?

MEASURING IMPACT.
Do you measure by change in number, percent change, rank of the region against another metropolitan area, or other method?

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS.
Is it measuring the impact for the city, a neighborhood, or other area?

LENGTH OF TIME.
Is it a full year after the end of the project, five years, or 10? Does it consider activity before and after the project?

LINK BETWEEN THE SERVICE AND THE SUBJECT.
Is there a link? If so, what is the direction? How strong is the relationship? What is the magnitude of the relationship? For example, does the change in the service have a positive, strong relationship with the measured subject that results in a large change?

BANG FOR THE BUCK.
What is the impact of the project per dollar spent? If the project provides a net benefit, does it provide enough benefit or as much benefit as a different project?

WHO BENEFITS?
Are they the "right" beneficiaries?

DOES THE MEASURE WORK AT THE MARGINS?
Does the measure cover all projects or does it focus on specific projects or specific project types?

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Zoning with Stipulations

LAW

THE SITUATION: YOU ARE A NEW—OR NOT-SO-NEW—MEMBER OF YOUR local planning and zoning commission. You serve in a city where rezoning approvals can be subject to stipulations, and are thus faced with crafting the language of the stipulations you wish to impose.

As a commissioner, you may ask: What exactly are stipulations? What is their purpose? When can we use them? Most importantly, what must commissioners know in order to write stipulations that are enforceable by statute?

First, it is important to know what stipulations are, and what they are not. Stipulations are: Conditions placed upon a governmental legislative or quasi-judicial approval or ruling that help to minimize impacts of the new regulation on adjacent properties. Stipulations are not: A contract, either between the government and the developer, or between the neighbors and the developer.

WHY DO WE NEED THEM? Stipulations have three main purposes:

1. To direct the actions of the project review staff after rezoning or other government action, during review of site plans and building plans
2. To direct the actions of the developer while building the project
3. To direct zoning enforcement staff after the project is completed

It is important to remember that stipulations affect multiple and diverse groups of people throughout the development process, and furthermore, that many of these people were not present when the stipulations were written. It is therefore critical to avoid vagueness or ambiguity as to the meaning and objectives intended by the stipulation. Ambiguity leads to questions later in the process, which you as commission members must always strive to avoid.

WHEN ARE STIPULATIONS NECESSARY? Zoning stipulations are frequently placed on three types of zoning actions. The first is rezoning, in which the zoning district on a parcel is changed to a different zoning district. The second is "use permits," sometimes called "conditional use permits." A use permit is a device designed to allow the inclusion of certain uses considered to be desirable in a zoning district, but which have a tendency to bring with them certain undesirable effects, such as traffic or noise, for example, from group homes or churches. The third is variances, which is a relief mechanism used by the government to build on the land in a way that would be prohibited if the zoning ordinance were strictly adhered to and observed. Planning commissioners are generally involved only in the first two instances, while the Board of Adjustment handles variance applications.

HOW DO WE WRITE STIPULATIONS THAT ARE ENFORCEABLE? When crafting language for zoning stipulations, make sure that they:

1. Are written clearly, so that the project review and zoning enforcement personnel know exactly what is intended. Language should not be susceptible to more than one interpretation and should use numerical or otherwise measurable standards.
2. Don't exceed—or limit—the authority given to the city in the zoning enabling act. For example, the city is not permitted to require ownership (as opposed to rental) of property, or mandate or exclude a particular use otherwise allowed in the district.
3. Don't violate First Amendment protections. While the temptation may exist to regulate certain uses that involve "speech," such as signs, music, or religious uses, doing so would violate the protections guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. While cities may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of speech, they may not regulate content.
4. Don't require the city to enforce a private contract between residents, or between residents and the developer. For example, master planned communities frequently include covenants, conditions, and restrictions, which place strictures on property that are similar in nature to zoning regulations. Also known as "deed restrictions," these private restrictions are enforced by private parties, and not by the city.

What not to do

Here are some real-life examples that were poorly written, along with suggestions to write them so that they are enforceable. The case at hand: a mixed use development that contains residential, commercial, and high-rise office uses on currently vacant land near mountains.

1. "The R1-18 lots shall be animal-friendly." Likely this stipulation crept in during the heated opposition by rural landowners during a hearing, and is susceptible to many meanings. Better: "Fencing around the R1-18 lots shall be constructed of wood or rope, but shall not contain barbed wire or be electrified."
2. "The restaurant may never play country-western music on the outside patio. It shall only play classical or top 40 tunes." Clearly, this is a free speech violation. Better: "Outdoor music may be played only before 11 p.m., and may not exceed 30 decibels measured at the property line."
3. "The height of the building shall be mitigated by color." The purpose of this stipulation is probably an aesthetic one. However, while zoning may be used to enhance the aesthetics of the built environment, this vague stipulation could easily lead to argument. Better: "The exterior of the building shall include only materials or paint whose colors are drawn from the approved color palette adopted by the city council."
4. "Upon the concurrence of adjacent property owners, the developer may file a variance request for an eight-foot wall." This is an unlawful delegation

of a governmental power to a private citizen. The power to regulate land use through zoning ordinances is given by statute to municipal legislative bodies and they cannot bargain away this power. In this example, the adjacent property owners could prevent the developer from applying for a variance, a right given to property owners by statute. Better: "The developer shall notify all property owners within 150 feet of the subject property of any request for a variance to the six-foot limit on wall height."

Stipulations are frequently drafted by the planning staff, and are sometimes called "standard condition." They may also be drafted by neighbors during negotiations with developers, by the planning commission, or by the city council. More often than not, it is during a hearing, when the language is quickly written, that the stipulations turn out later to be not enforceable. For this reason, some localities adopt policies that all stipulations, if written by neighbors or the developer, must be presented to city planning staff one to two days in advance of the public hearing. This allows city planners time to work internally to make certain the stipulation is legal and conveys the meaning intended by the writer. During a hearing, if planning commissioners wish to propose a stipulation, it is always best to seek the advice of the planning staff, who may propose specific language that can be included in a motion made by a commissioner.

As a member of your local planning commission, you're charged with making recommendations to your city council based on your experience and knowledge of standard zoning practices. Remember that when you need help with the latter, the planning staff and city attorneys are there to help you. You are an important part of a critical public review process, and you're not alone. When in doubt, ask!

—Margaret Wilson and Tom Awai

Wilson is an assistant city attorney in Scottsdale, Arizona. Tom Awai works for RBB Architects Inc., and is a former member of the planning commission in Phoenix, Arizona.

HISTORY

CITIES OF THE MIND

'Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.'

—KEVIN LYNCH

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE TERM "WAYFINDING"? This phrase, often used when describing the components and considerations of a downtown plan, refers to the ways in which people move about a city.

The first use of the term is credited to Kevin Lynch in his classic book *The Image of the City*, which described the components of a city from the viewpoint of its residents.

After researching three major U.S. cities, Lynch discovered that people generally envisioned their city as five separate, but related components. These components—paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks—have helped planners and urban designers understand how to create more livable cities. Lynch understood that good urban design recognizes that the built environment is more than just a collection of static objects; it is a visual map full of sensory cues that help guide our understanding of the world around us. This book made the case that "legible" urban design not only makes wayfinding easier and more efficient, it can also improve the richness of the lives of those who experience it.

—Ben Leitschuh

Leitschuh is APA's education associate.

Downtown Deadwood, South Dakota, demonstrates some of the components that Lynch describes in *The Image of the City*, such as paths and landmarks.

RESOURCE FINDER

Here are some helpful resources for working with institutions.

APA RESOURCES

Town-Gown Partnerships for Success
Dan Sitler, Michael Rudden, Rob Holzman, and George Homsy, AICP
PAS Memo, May/June 2006
planning.org/pas/memo/2006/may

Best Practices for Town and Gown Relations
Roger L. Kemp
Practicing Planner, Fall 2013
planning.org/practicingplanner/2013/fall/feature.htm

WEB RESOURCES

Smart Growth and Colleges and Universities
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
tinyurl.com/hmncf48

Campus Compact: helping institutions improve their communities
compact.org