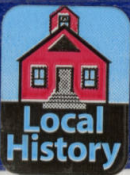


STUDY OF PROBLEMS OF PLANNING IN COLUMBUS



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A STUDY OF PROBLEMS OF PLANNING IN COLUMBUS

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A Joint Report

by

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE FOR GREATER COLUMBUS
DOWNTOWN AREA COMMITTEE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

MAY 1963

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Functions and operations of the Department of Planning of the City of Columbus have been observed, with the objective of determining means to increase efficiency and productivity, and to provide the basis for an expanding planning program.

Certain steps are recommended for immediate initiation, so as to better accomplish the present planning functions and to prepare for the expanded planning program being initiated. Time is of the essence and the following actions are recommended:

1. New salary schedules as recommended in the recent Frost study should be approved and implemented.
2. A position should be designated to assume full responsibility for the capital budget and program planning functions.
3. There should be created the new position of assistant director, and immediate efforts should be made to fill the position with a qualified person.
4. A new table of organization for the staff should be developed and implemented. This is necessary to better meet present responsibilities and to prepare for an increase in planning activity.
5. An ordinance is recommended which would revise and expand the structure of the commission. Seven members are suggested, to be appointed by the mayor with the approval of council, from among citizens of proven interest, ability and judgement.
6. The commission should review existing policies, revising them when appropriate, and devise and adopt whatever additional policies may be necessary to provide guidance and direction to both the commission and the staff.
7. There should be further investigation of the possibility of utilizing a fractional portion of the city income tax to finance the expanded planning activities anticipated.

A STUDY OF PROBLEMS OF PLANNING IN COLUMBUS

The status and functions of the Department of Planning in the City of Columbus have been observed, the objective being to identify impediments to more productive and efficient performance of the planning function. Major emphasis was originally concentrated upon the capital budget function, but in arriving at conclusions and recommendations, it was essential to extend the observation to other areas of both staff and commission responsibility and activity. Suggestions and recommendations which have been developed can, if implemented, result in a more satisfactory performance of the planning function, to the benefit of the city and the entire community.

There are some basic and readily identifiable obstacles to more effective functioning of the commission and the staff. Among these are the lack of overall direction resulting from inadequate policies, the absence of clear deliniation of staff responsibilities, salaries which are not adequately competitive, especially for the retention of personnel, and the resultant necessity to concentrate upon projects rather than programs.

Functional Problems

An instance of functional weakness was revealed by the manner in which the capital budget and program planning functions were undertaken in preparation of the 1963 capital budget.

The presently applicable ordinance (No. 221-62) requires that all participating departments, divisions or commissions shall submit to the City Planning Commission, not later than September 15 each year, details of projects needed during the ensuing five years. The directors of planning and finance are then to join in screening the requested projects, and the commission staff is to collect any additional information which may be required. The commission is to conduct public hearings on the proposals, and do anything necessary to enable the submission of a recommended program to council not later than December 15 each year. Among other things, both written and implied, the commission is to make certain that the projects as recommended are in conformance with the "master plan."

In 1962, project requests were for the most part submitted by the stated deadline, but little was done to assemble or evaluate the information until well into November. No deliberate oversight was involved - there simply was not a member of the staff adequately familiar, either in practice or in theory, to properly execute the function.

Finally, during November, the material was given a basic screening, tabulated, and turned over to the finance director without comment. Up to this point, the City Planning Commission had not considered nor even been informed of the projects requested.

During January 1963, conferences were scheduled by the mayor, including the directors of finance, service and planning, to consider the proposals. Since both the mayor and the service director serve as members of the commission, these meetings could conceivably have been construed to be the public hearings required of the commission, but this was not indicated. Changes in allocations of funds, scope and timing of projects were made at this time, but these were in consideration of fund availability rather than planning factors.

The finance director then undertook preparation of the capital budget ordinance, which was considered by the City Planning Commission at a special meeting. It is significant that members present included the mayor, service director and only one citizen member; this latter commission member was exposed to the proposals for the first and only time at this point.

Proposals were subsequently submitted to City Council and the 1963 Capital Budget was adopted as an emergency matter, but without benefit of the program for the remaining four years. Thus the situation remained until mid-May, 1963.

Organizational Weakness

The presently authorized strength of the staff is 18: a director and other personnel as determined necessary. Functionally, the staff is organized into two sections - comprehensive and administrative. Each of the sections is headed by a principal planner, one of which (administrative) is in process of being filled. Each

section has a position of senior planner, both of which are vacant. Five positions of city planner (two in comprehensive, three in administrative) are filled. The position of administrative analyst has been converted to "planning coordinator"; the position is, at least technically, a member of the planning staff, but in fact serves as a member of the staff of the mayor and has no planning functions. The position of research assistant is vacant. There are presently two full-time draftsmen who are assisted by two part-time employees; stenographic and clerical services are performed by two persons.

It is reasonable to assume that, if all presently authorized positions can be filled, together with certain reassignments of functions, the presently assigned tasks can be completed without undue delay, including those which arise from pressures of the moment. This would still not make any provisions for coping with the expanded planning program which is being initiated.

Observation indicates that much of the time of the director is demanded by matters which could be handled by others, and it is important to note that there are no provisions for an assistant director. Establishment of and adherence to any internal schedule would be extremely difficult under existing circumstances. This is due in part to the frequency of personnel turnover and existing position vacancies, but a major cause appears to be a lack of communication downward.

This downward communication must begin with the City Planning Commission, taking the form of clearly-stated policies and objectives, and continue through the Director of Planning to the levels of the planning technicians. Although staff conferences can be and sometimes are unproductive and time-consuming, this need not be the case; at any rate, there must be improved internal communication.

~~External~~ communication is similarly deficient. It is not suggested that the planning staff should present a brash or overly-aggressive front to the public; it is, however, essential that planning decisions and recommendations, as well as the planning factors

and principles upon which they are based, be presented effectively and in a manner clearly visible to those who wish to see; effective map work is vital.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission

Observation of the manner in which the planning function is performed indicates the desirability of actions by the commission which would greatly facilitate the accomplishment of its tasks by the staff. Any policies which may have been formulated by the commission should be reexamined, improved upon where appropriate, be made known, and serve as guides for the commission and the staff. In instances and areas where no policies have been developed, there should be immediate action toward their realization; in the absence of policies, there can be little effective direction of the staff. Meetings of the commission should continue with at least the present frequency, and a serious effort should be made by all citizen members to attend and participate.

During commission deliberations involving, for example, land use, there should be available adequate visual aids to explain and illustrate the subject matter. The spirit of an open meeting is violated by the present practice of passing from hand to hand small maps or drawings which are visible only to those seated at the table. The situation is aggravated by the lack of adequate display boards or usable wall space.

The Columbus Plan Commission, composed primarily of outside experts, was organized in 1906. In a report presented in February, 1908, this group proposed several improvements, including a belt highway around the city and a system of parks, but the recommendations were never systematically carried out.

In 1921, the first permanent Columbus Planning Commission was appointed by Mayor James J. Thomas. This group, with the assistance of a consultant, was instrumental in securing formal approval of a zoning map and ordinance for the city, effective August 6, 1923. The commission continued to function, particularly in the field of

of zoning, until 1932, when funds for a planning commission staff were deleted from the budget. Small appropriations were resumed in 1944, but as late as 1949 the commission's annual expenditures were less than \$15,000.00. Increasing pressures led to a greater interest in planning, and the budget was increased dramatically following the appointment of Ernest Stork as planning director in November, 1950. Steady progress has continued since that time, but the possibility exists that, through some combination of circumstances, the entire function could be eliminated by ordinance.

The commission, as presently constituted, consists of the mayor who serves as chairman, the director of public service who serves as secretary, and three citizens of the city who are appointed to six year terms by the mayor with the approval of council. The commission, according to the ordinance, is granted "all of the powers, authority, and duties granted to it by the Ohio Revised Code." It should be emphasized that the powers of the commission are limited to making recommendations to the legislative authority for final action.

It appears now that the importance of the planning function has been accepted in the community, and must inevitably increase in importance and stature as the "701" program gains impetus. Toward assuring the greatest benefit to the community of the effort and funds expended in this planning effort, it is timely to consider some actions which will help to create an atmosphere conducive to more effective, imaginative, efficient and productive planning activities.

The scope of the "701" planning activities, and the continuing efforts which will follow the accomplishment of a comprehensive plan, indicates an increasing work load for the commission and calls for the talents of citizens of proven ability in various professional areas of competence. Toward that end, it appears advisable that new ordinances should be prepared which would:

1. Provide for a City Planning Commission of seven members, appointed by the mayor with the approval of City Council. The three citizen members of the present commission should continue as members of the new commission to the expiration of their terms; new appointments should be so staggered as to expire one each year, with the final goal being appointment for a period of seven years.

To assure that the new commission would be representative of the community, incorporating at the same time persons of proven ability, selections should be made from citizen leaders of proven ability and judgment. Representation should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the professions of architecture, law, engineering and education. There should also be a real estate expert.

2. The ordinance should enumerate the functions and responsibilities of the commission, specifying the mandatory referral of all proposals for the physical development of the city, and the manner in which recommendations of the commission would be enacted into law, amended or modified, or reversed.
3. Provide for the appointment of a director and assistant director by the commission with the approval of the mayor. Other staff positions would be filled by the director, consistent with applicable procedure of the Civil Service Commission.

It should be borne in mind that the commission would continue in an advisory capacity, with final action still being required of city council and the mayor. The newly constituted commission should elect one of its members to serve as chairman, and other appropriate officers should be designated. They and the chairman should serve for one-year terms, but with no restrictions upon reelection or re-appointment for consecutive terms. There should likewise be no restrictions relative to service on the commission for more than one term.

The Staff

A reorganization of the staff is indicated. Such action would be of great benefit immediately and is essential for the expanded planning program which is being initiated.

A major weakness in the present structure results from the absence of a second-in-command. There should be created the new position of assistant director, with full

authority to act for the director in the absence of the latter. The functions of the assistant director will include relieving the director of all matters pertaining to office and staff administration, and it will be his responsibility to carry out the policies of the commission as they are related to administration. The assistant director will not normally make planning decisions. To enable the assistant director to properly carry out his functions and responsibilities, there must be a continuous interchange of information, and it will be his responsibility to establish and apply schedules for the accomplishment of various tasks.

In addition to the creation of the new position of assistant director, there should be established new sections with clearly defined areas of performance and responsibility, both functional, supervisory and reporting. One solution would be the creation of comprehensive, special project and administrative sections.

The comprehensive section, as the name implies, would be concerned with development and continuity of all elements of the comprehensive plan. The special project section would absorb those studies which arise from pressures of the moment but fall within neither the comprehensive nor the administrative categories. The administrative section would continue to administer zoning and subdivision regulations, and service all requests for information, at least to the point of determining proper disposition.

As a part of the reorganization, it is desirable that the present position titles be changed so as to more clearly indicate the level of competence and responsibility. The titles as proposed in the recently completed Frost study, i.e., planner I, II and III, are recommended for adoption. An advanced position of planner IV, although not presently indicated, should be considered as the planning program expands.

Capital Budget and Program Function

Special attention must be given to the position to assume the capital budget and program planning function. The position will require considerable freedom of action, and must be able to command the attention of personnel in other departments who are involved in capital improvement functions. For this reason, all operating divisions must be advised of the new position, and the administration should take any steps necessary to assure the fullest cooperation.

The capital budget planner should devise and keep current maps indicating the location and status of all capital improvements, whether completed, underway or programmed. There should be developed a system of periodic progress reporting, indicating the status of appropriated funds as well as the project. Frequent and continuing inspections of project sites will be necessary.

Capital budget forms, formidably long and complex, can be shortened and simplified. There should be prepared a manual of instructions, outlining procedures to be followed in preparation of project request forms and establishing clear and definite time schedules for performance of the various capital budget functions. Procedure for amendments to the capital budget should be included, and positions of responsibility within the departments of finance and planning should be identified. Deadlines, once established, should be adhered to, but City Council should never be asked to consider the adoption of a capital budget without having before it the proposed program for the subsequent four years.

To date, capital budgets have been based upon previously-determined bond issues. This practice should be reversed, with future bond issues being based upon carefully formulated capital programs which allow for consideration of various planning factors.

Salaries

In order to attract and retain competent personnel, salaries of planners must be at least competitive with other comparable cities. Present salaries are below those prevailing nationally for similar cities and job responsibilities, and compare un-

favorably with those of the Franklin County Regional Planning Commission. The recently released recommendations of the Frost study represent a major step toward correction of these inequities, as illustrated by the following:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Proposed</u>	<u>RPC</u>
Planning Director	\$9,558 - \$11,064	\$15,000	No range
Planner III	8,316 - 10,056	9,048 - \$12,090	\$9,870 - \$11,203
Planner II	6,264 - 7,560	7,436 - 10,452	8,640 - 10,560
Planner I	5,436 - 6,564	6,734 - 9,048	6,180 - 7,620
Admin. Analyst	6,264 - 7,560	6,422 - 8,606	
Coordinator	6,264 - 7,560		

The position of planning coordinator is included in this comparison although there is no functional relationship to nor responsibility within the staff organization. The position title should be changed to accurately reflect the nature of the position, and the salary should be charged against some other code than the planning department. The position of administrative analyst is so similar to that of planner II as to warrant identification as the latter.

Based upon the recommended salary schedule as presented above, including the new positions of planning technician (\$5,824 - 7,800), projections can be made of the fiscal effects of additions to the staff at various levels. If presently authorized positions could be filled from June 1, 1963, the following budget requirements could be anticipated:

1 Planner III	\$ 9,048 /yr.	\$ 1,968*
2 Planner II	7,436 /yr.	7,800
1 Planner I	6,734 /yr.	<u>3,367</u>
Cost to fill positions, 7 months		\$13,135
Recommended increases, present staff		<u>5,574</u>
		<u>\$18,709</u>

Thus it may be seen that, for \$13,135, the staff could be brought to its presently authorized strength for the remainder of the year; the increases for the present technical staff result in a relatively small figure. These actions would not, however, provide for the suggested new organizational structure, which would require

*Difference between present salary of one planner II, whose promotion to planner III is in process, and beginning salary for planner III.

the addition of nine persons to the present staff.

In determining the additional cost of the suggested reorganization, several assumptions must be made. One of these involves the position of assistant director, which does not now exist nor was it proposed in the Frost study. This position should be between those of Planner III and Planning Director, and a beginning salary of \$10,000 yearly may be assumed. Again assuming approval of this new position and success in filling it by June 1, 1963, the total listed above would be increased to \$24,542.

These observations are based upon the premise that the total reorganization, together with recruitment to fill all positions, would not be implemented during 1963. This appears to be reasonable, for the increased work volume resulting from the 701 planning program will not become appreciably more apparent before the end of the year; the full staff will be needed during 1964, and budget preparation for that year should be based upon the new table of organization.

Assuming approval of the salary schedules proposed in the Frost study, a reorganized and expanded planning staff, including an assistant director, planning technicians, draftsmen and new secretarial help, approximately the following fiscal demands for 1964 may be anticipated:

Planning Director		\$ 15,000
Assistant Director		10,000
Planner III	3 @ \$9,048	27,144
Planner II	4 @ \$7,436	29,734
Planner I	6 @ \$6,734	40,404
Planning Technician	6 @ \$5,824	34,944
Draftsman II	2 @ \$4,784	9,568
Draftsman I	2 @ \$4,342	8,684
Typist-Clerk III	1 @ \$4,784	4,784
Typist-Clerk II	2 @ \$3,926	7,852
Typist-Clerk I	1 @ \$3,926	3,926
Projected total personal service costs, 1964		<u>\$192,040</u>