

MEMORANDUM

TO: Committee on the Second Regional Plan  
FROM: Regional Plan Association Staff

The schedule for Friday morning, May 27, will be as follows:

Plenary Session as scheduled in workbook

Instead of 6 workshops, there will be only 3--

Workshop "D" will be combined with "A" under the chairmanship of Max Abramovitz in Conference Room "A".

Workshop "E" will be combined with "B" under the chairmanship of John Larsen in Conference Room "B".

Workshop "F" will be combined with "C" under the chairmanship of Donald C. Platten in Conference Room "C".

The Conference will close following these workshops at which time luncheon will be served.

May 27, 1966

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Participants in the first meeting,  
The Committee on the Second Regional Plan

FROM: Regional Plan Association Staff

DATE: May 27, 1966 (1:30 a.m.)

Locating office jobs and regional activities in relatively large (as well as smaller) diverse centers,\* containing many kinds of activities, was supported unanimously. As one person expressed it: "Spread city is a great improvement over the past, but it is not good enough for the future."

There were two reservations by participants who wanted to be convinced that (1) accessibility to the centers would be at least as good as it is to scattered suburban shopping centers; (2) such centers would not lead to crowding, and impersonal bigness encouraging people to let others take responsibility.

Though there was little disagreement with the idea of large diverse centers, the Committee asked for specifics at a later meeting:

1. Where?
2. What?
  - a. What types of jobs? e.g., research?
  - b. What other activities?
3. How large?
4. How?
  - a. How does one get started?
  - b. Who finances?
5. Can transportation be handled--both to the center and within it?

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\*There was some confusion over what we mean by a "center." Simply, it is a "downtown"--where many different activities go on. We use a different word to emphasize that downtowns need not follow the traditional design, that they can escape the usual congestion, dirt and, often, ugliness of old downtowns. In other words, we tried to get the location aspects of centers considered without the contamination of the design drawbacks of the past.

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Committee members suggested several ideas for the staff's consideration in reply to these questions:

Where?

Although one participant said it was cheaper to put such centers on vacant land, almost all other comments favored "growing" older downtowns into larger and more diverse centers.

Several places were proposed: Mitchel Field (Nassau County), Stamford, White Plains, New Brunswick, New Rochelle, Jamaica, Newburgh, Morristown, Paterson, Goshen, and the Republic Aviation airport on the Nassau-Suffolk border. Location on existing rail lines was emphasized by some.

The argument for growing large and new centers from the old and smaller downtowns was based partly on the existence of a tributary population and present jobs and supporting facilities.

The contribution of bigger and better centers in older cities to improving life for low-income groups living there and to encourage more diverse population to live in them also was suggested several times. Some participants apparently had in mind that areas around selected existing downtowns--which frequently is where poor people live--should be renewed for central activities, providing the residents can be relocated to their satisfaction. This may help diversify the social make-up both of these older cities and of the surrounding areas.

What?

Some felt that without the stimulus of at least one large national corporation headquarters, the office component of a center would not be important.

After a long discussion of urban vs. more rural universities, one group concluded that public universities probably should be urban, i.e., in a central place, easily accessible.

Good accessibility to community colleges and centers of continuing education also should be included in planning. Cultural facilities are a good "cement" for the large-scale community--and it's easier to raise money for them if they are felt to be part of a community, i.e., at a center which many people feel is their own.

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How large?

Some called for a great variety in sizes of the centers; one emphasized relatively small centers--but was not opposed to large. A few emphasized really large existing downtowns. Some asked whether subcenters could compete with Manhattan if transportation to Manhattan was speeded.

How?

The biggest question was: how can a center be started?

Some felt that the idea of centers was sufficiently convincing to catch on with those choosing locations or financing them.

Some felt that developing new centers would be difficult, but that public investment was a good place to start--perhaps a university or a hospital complex. One person observed that if a center did not grow up around these public institutions, nothing was lost--they still would perform the services for which they were built.

Other public levers noted to encourage activities to come together in centers: utility locations and transportation. Someone observed that federal grants to local areas for many purposes (highways, public transportation, parks, utilities) require a regional planning process, which implies some leverage to conform development of public investment to a plan.

Local officials need to understand the argument for centers. Many would genuinely like information from Regional Plan, though if they are to make the best decisions, their constituents also must be persuaded. Regional Plan's Goals for the Region Project (1963) should be continued to contribute to public understanding of the issues.

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Several participants--indeed it seemed to us the dominant mood--urged us to move ahead with confidence that the Region is looking for strong solutions, is ready for planning leadership. They left us feeling that cautious, hesitant proposals were the last things the Committee wanted from us.