



# Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

235 East 45th Street • New York, New York 10017 • (212) 682-7750

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## NEWS RELEASE

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For Information Call Sheldon Pollack  
(212) 682-7750; (212) PL 1-5748 (home)

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CHOICES FOR '76 DOCUMENTARY FILMING COMPLETED; TO PRESENT REGION'S  
PROBLEMS AND ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR PUBLIC VOTE

Regional Plan Association Program of Town Meetings  
Will Provide Citizen Opportunity to Participate in Planning Process

Completion of a film record of some of the most serious problems  
afflicting urban America was announced today by John P. Keith, President of  
the Regional Plan Association.

The film, divided into five one-hour-long segments, is to play a sig-  
nificant role in the historic \$1.5 million CHOICES FOR '76, the series of  
town meetings Regional Plan is launching the week-end of March 17.

Based upon scripts which distilled the findings of a long series of  
studies that cost private and public planning agencies over \$50 million, the  
films probe deeply into such subjects as housing, transportation, poverty,  
environment and cities and suburbs.

By utilizing the technology of television and computer, the Asso-  
ciation is creating a 20th Century version of New England's town meetings on  
a scale tailored for the 20 million inhabitants of the world's biggest metro-  
politan area.

Eighteen television stations, ranging from Hartford Conn., to Trenton, N.J., will show the films during five Saturday-Sunday-Monday periods. At the same time, discussion groups will be viewing them in private homes, halls and clubs.

Ballots or questionnaires, which will be available in newspapers and in banks, libraries and other public places, will be marked and sent to Regional Plan. There the results will be tallied. On the basis of those findings a sixth film based on government will be made and presented later.

Besides the film, a paperback book edited by William Caldwell, a Pulitzer Prize columnist-editor of The Record, and summaries of the issues in all kinds of news media publicity will prepare those who will take part in the town meetings.

"It has been a mammoth undertaking but reactions all through the Region have indicated that CHOICES FOR 76 has stimulated interest in the widest possible citizen spectrum," declared Keith. "Religious groups, business associations, civic organizations and others interested in reversing the trends dissipating the resources of the metropolis are participating."

Keith said it is hoped hundreds of thousands will participate in the town meetings.

Already, Keith pointed out, hundreds have become involved as teams of cameramen, working under the direction of Albert Waller, whose television documentaries have won numerous awards, have moved about the Region.

"It is probably the most ambitious undertaking of its kind," Keith said of the filming.

"This is not a documentary," Waller said. "It is a sophisticated educational film. In CHOICES FOR '76 we had to show not only the problem and possible solutions but the factors that created the problem."

In pursuit of the objective, Waller's cameramen shot over 200,000 feet of color film. Top cameramen were employed to make certain that the professionalism required for a project of the dimensions of CHOICES FOR '76 would be intact.

"Our crews would work for us one day," said Waller. "The next day they might be engaged in shooting films for an upcoming hit movie. We had enormous problems to overcome and we needed the very best talent to make sure of our results."

CHOICES FOR '76 was designed to give the democratic process the widest possible latitude. This meant that the underlying plan had to be arrived at democratically. To achieve this, Regional Plan named a citizens advisory committee of 120 members.

Chairman is Francis Keppel, former United States Commissioner of Education. Vice-Chairmen include such diverse figures as former Governor Alfred E. Driscoll of New Jersey, Theodore W. Kheel, the labor mediator, Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, and Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore, Jr.

The committeemen from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut represented equally contrasting viewpoints.

Regional Plan initiated the town meeting concept of CHOICES FOR '76 in the advisory committee itself. Material that formed the basis for the film scripts and the book, How To Save Urban America, was presented at group meetings, debated, refined and sent back to staff researchers for more work.

Typical of the planning meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee was that on environment. With 80 members present, a spirited debate developed on the problem of population. Fearful that arguments over birth control and abortions might raise diversionary issues which would diminish the impact of

the paper, it was finally agreed to frame the Choice question in this fashion:

"Do you favor or oppose public policies that would slow the birth rate?"

After a discussion on transportation, the staff added a new introductory section, altered five of the nine questions which will appear on the ballot.

The Association gave each of the 31 counties in the Region numerical representation in ratio to its share of the population. Since 20 percent of the Region is black or Puerto Rican, those minorities were given 27 of the 120 representatives. Age was considered and the advisors included a range from high school students to senior citizens. Politically the range was from conservative to liberal. As a class, most members of the committee could be considered community leaders.

Endorsements of the project were readily given by Senators Jacob K. Javits and James L. Buckley of New York, Harrison A. Williams, Jr. and Clifford P. Case of New Jersey, and Abraham Ribicoff and Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. of Connecticut.

CHOICES FOR '76 has been the costliest project undertaken by the 44-year-old Regional Plan Association. A \$300,000 grant was received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Contributions were made by 16 foundations. Other important help was given by corporations, commercial and savings banks, life insurance companies, utilities and the securities industry.

"All who have contributed must be thanked for having enabled the Association to present to the public a unique opportunity to indicate their CHOICES for the Region's future--to take part in the planning process," said Keith. "However, if the general public does not participate fully, the impact of this enormous effort may be wasted. All over the Region, priests, ministers,

and business, civic, labor and educational leaders are arranging now for the town meetings. It is Regional Plan Association's hope that there will be the greatest possible participation. Discussion leaders are being asked to sign up groups of eight to 10 persons to view the films with them, discuss them and then mail in each individual's personal responses on the ballots that are being provided."