

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.

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NEWS RELEASE

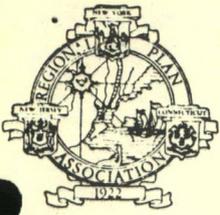
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The attached statement on the Assumptions, Goals and Urban Form element of the Westchester County plan was submitted to the County Planning Board today.



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Statement of
Regional Plan Association
to the
Westchester County Planning Board
on the
Proposed Development Policy Statement,
Assumptions, Goals and Urban Form

December 3, 1974

Regional Plan Association commends the Planning Department and the Planning Board's Development Policy Committee for this first step toward a County plan. We recommend its adoption by the Board of Legislators as official County policy and its use by federal, State, County and municipal governments and private investors in determining their policies. We urge the County's civic organizations to acquaint themselves with this document and mobilize public opinion in its support when public and private policies are being formulated--such as the location of a major office building or an institution like a hospital or higher education; the design, density and housing types of proposed residential subdivisions; road changes, bus routes and transit finance; protection of open space; provision of development infrastructure such as sewer and water lines.

Assumptions, Goals and Urban Forms Concept

Regional Plan Association strongly supports County planning. We also support--generally--this particular element in the Westchester County plan, Assumptions, Goals and Urban Form.

Particularly, we commend the emphasis on:

- strengthening traditional centers of activity,
- protection of open space around communities to strengthen the sense of community,
- acquiring County parks in the more heavily developed areas,
- the "urgent need to upgrade public transit," and
- the goal of "a wide range of housing types."

We feel that development needs--given present job and population expectations--can be handled adequately within the urban framework provided, and we strongly support the underlying urban form concept of confining development to a relatively small portion of the County so that natural open space can remain over much of it.

However, we would like to offer some points of clarification which can be reflected in the use of this document and in the subsequent elements of the County's plan.

1. The concept on page 10 of providing open space buffers between communities should be reflected in the map in a number of places, particularly the North Saw Mill River corridor. Development corridors are a sensible device, but they should be made up of separate communities--as this report recommends along the Hudson--not strip city.

2. It should be made clear that development corridors between community centers should consist of clustered residential developments,

not nonresidential facilities--which should be confined to large and small centers. NO more shopping centers; NO more office campuses; NO more strip commerce. Centers and communities.

3. Residential density should relate to access to centers. Places close (in travel time) to centers of activity should be denser than places farther away. In general, a "density gradient" should exist around centers--highest density in and near the center, tapering off to very low density on the urban fringes--the larger the center, the higher the density. This being so, there seem to be places around White Plains that should provide for higher density.

4. Centers cannot work unless they are compact enough to walk among the facilities. This is essential to avoid auto use within the center throughout the day--getting into and out of a car to go to a meeting, eat at a restaurant, shop, attend a class. Compactness--walking scale--also is essential for bus service of high enough quality to attract people from their cars. People will not walk far to and from a bus; all residential neighborhoods and business centers must be designed with this in mind if good transit is to be provided. (Office campuses even alongside each other will not do, nor will strip commerce.)

5. Population and job growth in the New York Region will not continue long if present birth and in-migration rates continue. This has two implications for Westchester's planning: (1) We need not plan mainly in defense of being overrun with population; (2) we must make the best use of every new facility if our existing centers are to be strong enough to compete with highwayside facilities and achieve the advantage of centers.

This being so there should be no expansion in the cross-county shopping center. All such growth belongs in the three downtowns of the Southern Tier.

6. Because of their location, we see a qualitative difference between Peekskill and Mt. Kisco and the other centers indicated as "intermediate." These two should serve a wider-than-local area; the other centers should be primarily local.

7. Similarly, White Plains has a qualitative difference from all the others: it is the principal County center by virtue of its mid-County location. All one-of-a-kind facilities expected to serve most people in the County should be there.

8. The need--for environmental as well as economic and humanitarian reasons--to provide housing for those presently employed in Westchester who cannot afford to live there deserves far more attention than it is given. Now, employees are travelling great distances, almost always one person to a car because of scattered job sites and scattered home locations. This hurts us all. The goal of more employment should be read as including appropriate housing for all employees.

Importance of County Planning

Only through county planning can energy use and environmental damages be minimized, a sense of community maintained, efficiency of the economy maximized, good public transportation provided, auto trips minimized, and adequate housing assured. A mosaic of municipal plans cannot accomplish these goals--and, indeed, the County already is suffering in all these regards by its reliance on municipal planning for all purposes.

To most Westchester residents, the local area is very important; but we must recognize that none of us restricts his or her life to that area. We are Westchesterites as well as Greenburghers, Mount Vernonites, Yorktowners; and only by getting together to plan the future of the County can we influence the larger environment in which we actually live.

Furthermore, even that part of our lives carried out exclusively in our local area is strongly influenced by planning policies made without our voice by surrounding municipalities. In fact, under home rule, each municipality plans for many municipalities, not just for itself. But the others cannot participate: they are part of the home but not of the rule.

Through County planning, we can participate in those planning decisions that affect more than one municipality without encroaching on the right of each municipality to make decisions that affect only itself.

Function of County Planning

While the major land-use controls remain in municipal hands-- zoning and building codes--substantial leverage for influencing development remains with the County, the State and the federal government. Furthermore, in many cases, what is best for the whole County is also best for the individual municipality, so that the County planning view will be accepted voluntarily by the municipality. (This would be true more often were there a Statewide school tax.)

County Planning Process

If the County plan is to have an impact, it must be known to the people of the County. Otherwise, short-range municipal interests cannot help but overwhelm it as they have so often overwhelmed County Planning

Board recommendations to municipalities. Further, if the County plan is to reflect the broad needs of the County's residents, it should be developed in a give-and-take process as the work goes along.

We strongly recommend that subsequent elements in the County plan be worked out in continuous consultation with civic organizations and at key intervals with the public at large. This document forms an excellent basis for beginning those discussions.