

MINUTES

REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION, INC.
SPECIAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
February 15, 1979
12:15 p.m.

Location
The Meadowlands Hilton Hotel
Secaucus, New Jersey

Attendance

Board: Willard G. Hampton, Thomas H. Kean, John P. Keith, Donald R. Knab, Thomas G. Labrecque, Edward M. Lamont, Edward J. Lenihan, Jack John Olivero, Verdell Roundtree, Richard B. Sellars, Eleanor Todd

Guest: Edwin F. Nieder, Director - Public Affairs Information at AT&T

Staff: Richard T. Anderson, Sheldon Pollack, William B. Shore, Jeffrey M. Zupan

Thomas G. Labrecque presided for William M. Ellinghaus, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer.

Mr. Labrecque said the meeting is being devoted entirely to discussion of the Hackensack Meadowlands and critical policy questions facing the Meadowlands Development Commission and the State of New Jersey.

Mr. Shore said the Meadowlands issue is central to the Second Regional Plan concept of metropolitan centers, because the District is surrounded by a number of medium-sized downtowns, including the State's largest--Newark. He reviewed the many research steps taken by the Association over the past 15 years for the Second Plan and testing it with the public. Moreover, he said, the Board reaffirmed the Plan's principles following recommendations of a special Mission Review Committee in the mid-1970's. In all of this, he said, the importance of centralizing major regional activities was affirmed.

Mr. Shore explained that the current situation in the Meadowlands has arisen over proposals for three commercial centers, two of which require changes in the District's zoning regulations. He said staff is not suggesting that Regional Plan is expert in retail planning but that individual shopping center decisions may not add up to good regional development. This is a good example, he said, of how developers responding to current "rules of the game" from a local standpoint are jeopardizing the aggregate future of the Region.

Regional Plan has been involved with the Hackensack Meadowlands since the 1920's, said Mr. Shore; we worked hard to see the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission established in the mid-1960's and devoted considerable effort to convince the Commission in 1972 that downtown activities--primarily offices and department stores--should be minimized in the Meadowlands Master Plan in favor of housing, open space, manufacturing and distribution facilities.

What makes the current situation especially critical, Mr. Shore explained, is no growth in the Region and the reality that development in the Meadowlands will--to a great extent--be at the expense of its neighboring communities. Moreover, he said, State, regional, and national urban policies all are focussed on existing cities, and a new downtown in the Meadowlands would not be consistent with these policies.

Mr. Anderson said the Board had received a proposed statement on Hackensack Meadowlands development for suggested delivery to the Meadowlands Commission and State administration. He said the statement recommends revision of the Master Plan and zoning regulations, because they no longer are consistent with adopted government policies and the economic realities facing the Region. While this is being done, he said, the Commission should impose a moratorium on applications for major retail and office construction.

The proposed statement suggests that the Meadowlands is an important test of the State's intentions, said Mr. Anderson. Either it is going to focus on the existing cities with all the forces government can muster, or it is going to foster the extensive new development permitted under current zoning. The Meadowlands Commission's actions in concert with State investment will be a clear message of the State's direction.

Mr. Anderson explained that the three commercial center proposals all call for at least one million square feet of retailing, large amounts of office space, additional industrial development, and housing. It is the office and retailing components that are most questionable, he said, because the nearby cities can and should accommodate this development. For example, he said, Newark has more than eight acres readily available next to the Gateway Center for new office construction. He said the prospective Meadowlands developers should be enlisted by the State for projects within the adjacent cities, and the prospects there are far more attractive than prevailing sentiment would indicate.

In discussion, the Board considered the incentives necessary to get office and retail development into cities and the complex nature of the issues surrounding the Meadowlands situation. What makes it especially difficult, said Mr. Sellars, is that the Meadowlands proposals are relatively well-prepared, but they will not add up to the type of regional development pattern needed by New Jersey to be competitive in the 1980's. He said New Jersey must curb its continuing sprawl; the Meadowlands is an important test.

At this point, Mr. Keith directed attention to a letter he had received from George Roniger, who could not attend the meeting. Mr. Roniger supported the proposed Meadowlands position statement saying "the proposed regional shopping center in the Meadowlands has the potential of being the wrong project, in the wrong place, at the wrong time." His letter also suggested that the Association should assist State, city, and Meadowlands authorities to encourage developers to "invest in the Region in a manner constructive for all interested parties."

Mr. Keith also reported a conversation with Alan Fortunoff, who said that he did not believe that Regional Plan should favor one retail development over another, despite the fact that he has a store in Paramus which might suffer from Meadowlands retailing competition. Mr. Fortunoff did agree, Mr. Keith said, that an Association position indicating that the State of New Jersey should not compete against itself would be acceptable; i.e., that the State should foster Newark or the Meadowlands, but not both.

Mr. Knab said the Meadowlands question is an example of the market system in conflict with good regional planning. Developers are responding to the situation as they perceive current development prospects, he said, and they do not have confidence that the urban alternative will work. He supported the proposed position for its compelling logic, but cautioned that short-term prospects for its success are not good.

Other Directors said the Association must emphasize the importance of building on existing cities, even if it is not popular or realistic in the short term. That is the Association's role--to be out ahead. Staff also was advised to exercise care in release of RPA's statement, because it could be easily misinterpreted. Mr. Lenihan added that it is not enough to support cities generally; the Association should develop specific proposals for urban revitalization and work with all interested parties in obtaining downtown success.

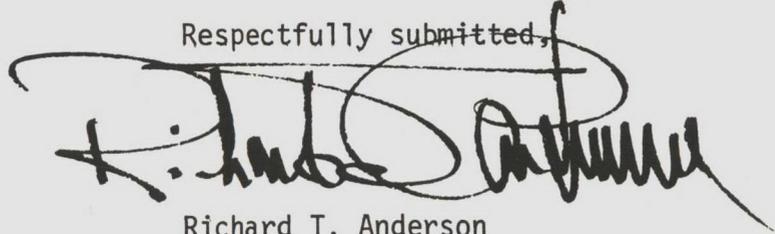
In summary, the Board adopted the proposed position in principle and advised that public release emphasize the logic of the Association's position rather than opposition to the current commercial center proposals. Mr. Labrecque said the most important issue is revision of the Meadowlands Plan, not whether Hartz Mountain Industries gets its zoning change. He suggested that the position be discussed with the Meadowlands Commission in a private meeting before public release.

Mr. Keith said he would explore this with Patricia Sheehan, Commission Executive Director, and also meet with the mayors of the surrounding cities to brief them on Regional Plan's position and enlist their support.

The Board also suggested that the transportation implications and potential costs of large-scale development in the District should be quantified and included in the position statement. With this added information, staff was asked to move quickly to finish the statement, seek a meeting with the Meadowlands Commission, gain the support of the mayors, meet with key State officials, and release the statement to the press.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at
2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard T. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Richard T. Anderson
Secretary

RTA/rs/cc