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METROPLAN: REAL OR RHETORICAL PARTICIPATION?

"The traditional view of planning is of a mysterious process which is carried on by the 'experts' behind closed doors, at the end of which a finished product, the plan, is unveiled for all to see. METROPLAN introduces a radical departure from that concept. Public participation will be an integral part of every stage in preparing the new plan. For the first time anywhere, all the people who live in Metro are being asked to contribute in a systematic way to planning the future of the city as a whole. Only in this way can Metro as a city respond to the needs and aspirations of its residents."

From the statement by Mr. Paul Godfrey, Chairman, Metropolitan Toronto Council, on the Launching of the Metroplan Program, April 8, 1974.

"'Citizen participation' has recently become very fashionable in Metropolitan Toronto. Only a few short years ago the attitude of civic politicians and bureaucrats toward citizen groups seeking to protect their interests was typically suspicious and hostile. Many individuals who ventured forth to protest certain planning decisions found their elected representatives to be indifferent at best. In case after case - Trefann, Don Vale, St. James Town West, Lionstar, Windlass, Quebec-Gothic, the Spadina Expressway hearings - citizens acting individually or in groups found themselves 'up against City Hall'."¹

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1. These experiences are documented in such publications as James Lorimer, The Real World of City Politics (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1970), John Sewell, Up Against City Hall (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1972), David Lewis Stein, Toronto For Sale (Toronto: New Press, 1972), Maureen Quigley, Democracy Is Us (Toronto: Ontario Department of Municipal Affairs, 1971)

By 1972 the climate had changed. During the fall election campaigns the slogan of "citizen participation" was heard across Metro with almost all candidates enthusiastically endorsing the idea. After the election, citizen involvement in City Hall business increased on several levels - from appointments to boards, commissions and advisory committees to inclusion on task forces and working committees.¹

Specifically in the area of planning, the notion that residents living in areas which would be affected by planning decisions had the right to early participation in open public discussion of the issues and in some cases involvement in planning itself was being taken for granted. In contrast to the Spadina experience, Metro planners and politicians were now eagerly seeking active public involvement as the approach taken by the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan Review so clearly demonstrated.

It is, therefore, not surprising that in preparing a new and official plan for the region, Metro Council and the Metro Planning Board have embraced an "open planning" approach. The programme now underway to facilitate this participation is known as Metroplan.²

In this Comment we express some misgivings about the citizen participation phase of Metroplan - its design and its objectives. In brief, our concern is that the program's aims are inconsistent and unclear, that its structure is poorly defined and that it has underlying political implications which are worrisome. It is not our intention to discuss all of the stages of preparation of the new official plan. However, before turning to Metroplan itself, it might be helpful to look briefly at the general planning context in order to answer two basic questions:

- * why is Metro undertaking the preparation of a new plan?
- * how important is Metro's planning function in relation to the area municipalities?

In 1972 Metro began to prepare for the creation of a new official plan, in accordance with The Planning Act of Ontario, which stipulates that a planning board must have an official plan and review it at regular intervals. Although it was being treated as an "official" document, the 1966 Metropolitan Plan had never, for a variety of reasons, been proposed to or adopted by the Province. By 1972 this 1966 plan had become outdated and a comprehensive review was needed. The aim was to produce a new official plan by early 1976.³

The responsibility for planning in Metropolitan Toronto is shared by three levels of government. In May, 1970, with the introduction of the Toronto-Centered Region Plan, the Ontario Government established the dominant role for itself in creating a third level of planning responsibility

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1. This increased involvement began in the City where the first tentative steps toward institutionalizing citizen participation in local planning were taken in 1969 in Don Vale and Kensington. Since 1972 the use of task forces and planning groups to solve local planning problems has become widespread.
 2. The term Metroplan is being used both in reference to the total programme to prepare a new Metropolitan plan and to the public participation program, which is intended to be an integral part of its every stage.
 3. Goals in Official Plans, Report prepared for the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board by R.S. Lang and J.B. Page, December 1973, p.1.

in Metro. Prior to this, the planning relationship between Metro Council and the local municipalities had been one of "partnership" with both sides having equal status but different functions. The present three-level system is hierarchical with Metro Council subordinate to Queen's Park and the area municipal councils subordinate to Metro. Of course, both Metro and the area municipalities are intended to have their own planning role within which they are to have planning freedom. According to the division of responsibilities, the Province is responsible for the general "urban form" of the region, Metro is to guide the "urban structure", while the area municipality is to be responsible for determining its own land use pattern.¹ However, the freedom of the area municipalities to decide planning questions is constrained by Metro's concept of what the region's urban structure should be² - and it is this concept which the new official plan will define. Hence, the significance of the new Metropolitan plan and the potential significance of the special program for public participation in its preparation.

METROPLAN:

1. What it is:

Metro Council and the Metro Planning Board are co-sponsors of a program which hopes to involve citizens in the formulation of "The Plan for the Urban Structure of Metropolitan Toronto" - a comprehensive statement of Metro's long-range planning goals.

The nature of this new metropolitan plan is not easy to define. According to Metro planners, it will not be a traditional master land use plan but rather,

"a series of policy goals, each of which will deal with one of the physical, economic or social systems of which Metropolitan Toronto is comprised or with the relationship between two or more such systems."³

The kind of goal statements which Metro says it is seeking to make are limited to planning matters for which Metro council has acknowledged responsibility, but they are also very comprehensive. For instance, these goals will include such key components as the distribution of employment, housing distribution and densities, and the transportation network. In

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1. Plan for the Urban Structure of Metropolitan Toronto, Volume I: Metropolitan Planning Function and Procedures (Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, August, 1972). This publication provides a clear explanation of the three-level planning system and the division of responsibilities. Thus the Province defines the zones for urban growth and rural greenbelt, also the major transportation corridors; Metro sorts out the overall economic, social transportation, servicing systems, etc; the area municipality controls specific planning decisions as to land development.
 2. "When an area municipal council has adopted an official plan or amendment thereto, it shall submit such plan or amendment to the Metropolitan Council for approval." The decision of Metro Council can be appealed to the Minister of TEIGA. Ibid, p.60.
 3. Plan for the Urban Structure of Metropolitan Toronto, Volume 3: Towards a Concept of Urban Structures (Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, September, 1972), p.1

setting forth the ideal systems, the goals will take account of factors like service facilities, social issues, the amount of taxes which people will tolerate, etc. The plan is intended to remain flexible and open-ended; one senior planner explained that it will really be like a loose-leaf binder, with pages being added as goals are defined, even as other pages are being reviewed.¹

The elements of the Metroplan participation program are, tentatively:

- 1) Dissemination of Information - which involves a publicity campaign to create awareness of the process.
- 2) Study and Analysis - the Planning Board intends to prepare thirteen reports on various aspects of Metro's planning history, present form and possible futures.² These studies are to provide material to guide public discussion.
- 3) Discussion and Discovery - at this stage citizens will react to the reports generated by the Planning Board, begin to discuss their concerns and suggest possible solutions to Metro's dilemmas.
- 4) Recommendations - utilizing citizen input, the Metro Planning Board will make recommendations as to the options for Metro Toronto; these will go forward to Metro Council for debate and approval.

II. How It Works

Briefs may be submitted by individuals or groups. Citizens are to be encouraged to form "study groups" (within or between organizations and neighbourhoods and/or randomly at public meetings) with the purpose of discussing the Planning Board Reports and studying other information relevant to Metro's future. The group may choose to focus on one aspect of the region's planning needs, or may elect to examine the entire urban structure. The exact form in which recommendations produced by study groups shall be presented to the Planning Board is as yet undetermined. However these suggestions are ultimately conveyed, the Planning Board is to utilize this citizen input in its formulation of an "Options and Goals" report. This report is to be submitted to citizens for their reaction and ultimately one option will be chosen by the elected members of Metro Council.

III. Rationale

The stated raison d'etre of this extensive participatory program is that "the citizens must set the goals for this city". The "opening-up" of the decision-making process and participatory planning which will avoid confrontation are the objectives.

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1. Interview with Mr. George Peter, Principal Planner, Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, May 8, 1974.
 2. A fourteenth report on Urban Transportation will be produced separately as a product of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan Review.

IV. Evaluation

As the Metroplan literature itself admits, this is the "first time ever that people who live in Metropolitan Toronto have been able to contribute in a systematic way to planning the future of the 'city' as a whole". Ordinary citizens are to be involved in "every stage" of the decision-making process.

This may be a laudable goal and at first glance seems to represent a marked improvement over past approaches. In the recent past, the prevailing planning theory has been that planners (in view of their professional expertise), together with politicians, ought to monopolize the planning process. It is heartening to see this explicitly rejected in Metroplan. The authors of the plan appear to endorse the notion that citizens have the right to participate in planning the future of their region in an extensive and meaningful way.

But a closer examination reveals that Metroplan may have some critical weaknesses - in its general aims, structural arrangements and political premise.

(a) Metroplan's aims: inconsistent and unclear

The statement that the citizens ought to determine the goals and objectives for Metropolitan Toronto is made without qualification, but what this means in terms of actual decision-making is not clear. If we look at Metroplan in the light of recognized models of participation, this confusion becomes more apparent.

The four most common models are:¹

- 1) Information model - the emphasis in this situation is on a one-way flow of information, from the authority to the citizen; the objective is to create a more informed electorate but not to promote sharing in decision-making.
- 2) Consultation model - in this situation the citizen is given the opportunity to obtain information about and comment on the particular issue and to participate in the development of alternative solutions. Although decision-making in this model rests with the decision-makers, this is the stage at which many theorists argue that citizen participation really begins.
- 3) Partnership model - here citizens are allowed to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such devices as joint planning committees.
- 4) Citizen control model - the fullest form of public participation in which the decisions are made by the citizens themselves; this requires a decentralization of decision-making to put power in the hands of citizens.

1. For example, see a recent formulation in the Proceedings of the Man and Resources Conference, Part I (Montreal: 1974). Also Francis J. Bregha, Public Participation in Planning Policy and Programme (prepared for the Community Development Branch, Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1974), chapter IV.

With the above models in mind, it is easy to see that there is a discrepancy between the articulated goals and the process of Metroplan. Several of the statements seem to point to the fourth model, with citizens actually setting the priorities and goals. Other statements seem to fall within the bounds of a partnership model. Those involved with the project describe it as an attempt to get the fullest participation possible within limits - "a partnership deal". Yet the process, as defined in the literature and at the first two public meetings, does not really go beyond the consultative model.

For example, let us look at the "neutral" role envisaged for the Metro Planning Board. The brochure states:

"The Metro Planning Board can furnish the data and advice for understanding the problems and causes."

Public participation is to take its cue from the fourteen reports on various aspects of Metro Toronto's urban structure. However, these reports, which are intended as working documents for the study groups, may in themselves tend to limit the scope of the study reports which are to follow. Then after these reports are submitted, it is the Planning Board staff who will formulate the final "Options" document. The process of analysis, interpretation, and synthesis required to do this again has the obvious potential to reduce the direct impact of citizen participants. There is, as far as we can tell, no guarantee that the views of citizens will be accurately and directly reflected in the Planning Board's fifteenth and last report - i.e. the coordinating "Options and Goals" document.

Eventually, politicians, unconstrained by the recommendations of either citizens or the Planning Board, will determine the final form of the Plan. The rhetoric of citizens setting goals may be obscured in the reality of the process.

This is not to say that we necessarily would be in favour of a "partnership" or "citizen control" situation. It may well be that the most valuable contribution which a project with a Metro focus can make is of an educative and informative nature - and that the actual formulation of the official plan cannot realistically be a partnership effort with the citizenry at large. The point is that this discrepancy between the articulated goals of the project and its design creates ambiguity and confusion in the minds of citizens.¹ At the same time, it raises the possibility that a mandate may later be claimed which doesn't really exist.

(b) The structural arrangement - vague and unwieldy

Another obvious problem with the process is its unmanageability. As it is defined, we have difficulty in picturing how it will accomplish its ends. Each study group theoretically should be able to contribute

1. Interestingly enough, at the two Metroplan public meetings attended by our BMR staff, no ad hoc study groups were formed in response to the request to do so. The questions asked indicated that the people were confused as to how they should "plug in" to the program, and what to expect from their participation. Most seemed to feel that the program was too vague and ill-defined.

its own "urban structure" concept for the Metro of the future. This would require members of that group to read and digest all fourteen reports, gather all other relevant material, write reports and set priorities. If they hope to get beyond a collection of "motherhood" guidelines and into specific planning goals, they face a super-human task.¹.

(c) Political implications - more power to Metro?

One of our major concerns relates to the political implications of Metroplan. The emphasis in the public participation program seems to be on a direct Metro-citizen relationship which may tend to circumvent the area municipal level. In theory, the Metropolitan Planning Board has provided for a Joint Coordinating Committee which is to include appointed representatives from the six area municipal planning boards. This Committee's function has been tentatively defined as,

"reviewing the Metropolitan Plan preparation program and suggesting some of the feasible alternative solutions to the problems of urban structure identified in that program."².

However it is essential to note that this Joint Coordinating Committee has not yet met - it is scheduled to have an inaugural meeting early this June. Moreover the specific role of this Committee and its relationship to the study groups and the Planning Board have not been spelled out. We would expect that at this inaugural meeting the position of the local municipalities will be established and that their involvement in Metroplan will begin. We hope this will be the case and that their role will not be peripheral.

As was explained in the beginning of this paper, the planning system for Metro Toronto involves three levels of government; and while the arrangement is hierarchical, it also recognizes that each level has an essential role to play. Between Metro and the Local municipalities these roles are not mutually exclusive for, obviously, community land use patterns cannot be isolated from regional plans as to parks, transportation, population distribution, etc. It is our view that if each of the boroughs and the City is not significantly plugged in to the process of creating a plan for Metro, serious problems may arise; either the exercise will prove futile in that Metro schemes will be judged unacceptable in light of local

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1. In this connection, it is relevant to note the Liveable Region Program currently in progress in the Greater Vancouver area. This program (which like Metroplan aims to involve the people of the regional area in the creation of an overall plan) provides for nine policy committees, composed primarily of citizens and some government representatives. Citizens interested in participating were invited to apply to the G.V.R.D. Planning Department to be appointed to one of these committees. This approach is more structured and less "grass roots" than the Metroplan project.
 2. Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, Executive Committee Report, February 6, 1974.

planning requirements; or Metro will succeed in creating an official plan, seek to impose it and antagonize its constituent municipalities. We therefore prefer a structure which reflects the realities of Metro's confederative nature.

In addition, we would suggest that a participation program, which is rooted in existing local political structures, would be far more comprehensible to citizens who wished to participate.¹ It might be countered by some that this approach will encourage parochialism and discourage a Metro-wide perspective. Yet the response to Metroplan to date would seem to suggest that few people are able to become involved in planning on a Metro-wide scale and that they are best able to understand Metro-wide issues as they affect their own communities. In this connection, Metro Toronto's Planning Commissioner, recently admitted that "people appear to be interested only in what is going on in their own back year or neighbourhood."² If this is the reality, why not build a participatory program which reflects it?³

CONCLUSION

We are sceptical about the Metroplan project. The vision of hundreds of ad hoc study groups springing up across the Metro area with the motivation and perseverance needed to produce the kind of in-depth briefs upon which a regional official plan for the future could be based seems excessively optimistic. The primary role assigned to citizens in determining the final plan seems incompatible with the process as set out; and the suspicion exists that this might be either a giant exercise in futility, or worse, a charade which is given credibility. By going directly "to the people" of Metro before the role of the City and the boroughs has been clarified and publicized, Metroplan raises some questions of a political nature.

In general, it is our view that the Metroplan idea represents a bow in the direction of the new "participation" trend - but it has not been clearly and realistically thought out in terms of its purposes and methods.

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1. Traditional theories of participatory democracy have generally emphasized that local issues were most likely to cause citizens to become extensively involved in the political process.
 2. Globe and Mail, May 6, 1974.
 3. This approach was originally considered as one of three possible options for the public participation component. In his report to the Metro Planning Board (October, 1973) Mr. Henry Fletcher discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a program begun at the ward level and progressed to the area municipal level. While the option was rejected - it was the most complicated and highest cost option - the advantages cited included maximum public involvement. Plan for the Urban Structure of Metropolitan Toronto, (Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, November, 1973), Appendix II.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Metroplan project be clarified in terms of its objectives so that citizens can more easily understand why and how they are to participate.

The kind of participation which we suspect would be most effective and feasible in such an extensive planning undertaking would be a genuinely consultative approach. This consultative form should have sufficient guarantees to ensure

- that the public would have maximum opportunity to obtain information about the issues
- that all interested individuals and groups would be encouraged to participate
- that mechanisms (such as the study groups) be encouraged to permit citizens to study the problems in depth and design and evaluate alternatives
- that the views of citizens be taken into account by planners and politicians - for example, all information obtained from the public as input to Metroplan should be made available in its original form - to the public at large as well as to the news media.

The advantages of this consultation model are that it will permit as much citizen involvement as the planning board wants and at the same time will not lead to exaggerated claims of partnership and shared decision-making.¹

- (2) That the structure of the participation program be strengthened to ensure that the ultimate plan is developed "in consultation with" the public.

- that the methods of involving citizens be made more structured than the proposed ad hoc study groups
- that existing interest and community groups be directly encouraged to participate
- that the program begin at the local level, perhaps with introductory open ward meetings; the cost of hiring Metro field staff to promote involvement at the ward level could perhaps be avoided by working with area municipal planning boards and their neighbourhood planners.

1. Given the fact that the existing planning and political process does not provide for citizens to play a truly "joint" planning role in decision-making, exaggerated claims about citizen participation could be counter-productive, even lead to cooption, and limit the influence which citizens have been wielding through traditional pressure group activity.

(3) That the arrangements for incorporating input from Metro's member municipalities be clarified as to their role in all of the stages of the plan's preparation; and with regard to the citizen participation component we suggest:

- that each of the borough councils and City council examine and evaluate the Metroplan project from their point of view
- that the ideas of both the area municipal planners and politicians as to how citizens can best be involved in Metroplan be reflected in the design of the program.

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