

Mandatory planning seen in near future

By DR. JOHN M. DEGROVE
Director, FAU/FIU Joint Center
for Environmental and Urban Problems

Regionalism in several forms has emerged as a major issue in almost every state in the nation over the past few years. While it is in evidence almost everywhere, efforts to define what we mean by regionalism in a precise way defy final solution.

I use the term "regional" to mean governmental approaches that are multi-county in nature. While it is true that some metropolitan areas are contained within one county, and thus technically qualify under the regional approach definition, my main concern will be with multi-county regionalism.

IF REGIONALISM has emerged as an idea whose time has come, it seems reasonable to ask why. As in all complex questions, there are many answers that bear on the issue. First, it can be stated safely that the nature of the functional problems facing urban America have become more and more difficult to handle except on a regional basis. As the geographic boundaries of the metropolitan area expand farther into the urban fringe, regionwide problems such as transportation, air and water pollution, and many others increasingly and persistently demand regional solutions.

The federal government, long indifferent to those regional pressures, in the past decade has replaced that indifference with an increasing concern for a regional framework within which to channel federal grant dollars. This federal pressure has certainly been a prime motivator in the council of governments movement, which to date is the major expression of "general purpose" regional structures. More recently, it might be argued, the federal government support of regional revenue sharing has been at least indirectly diluted by general and special revenue sharing.

A more recent pressure, and one that is perhaps fairly unusual, comes from state legislative and executive branches to force regional solutions to regional problems. The area of land use and growth management is an important example.

FINALLY, AS thoughtful people continue to assess the dilemma of central city and suburbia, and become increasingly convinced that the nation cannot go on attempting to resolve the problems of the two areas separately, some kind of regional approach that brings the entire metropolitan region into one decision-making system seems an absolute necessity. Central cities must be rescued from their desperate fiscal and service delivery problems. At the same time, the emergence of smaller versions of these same problems must be prevented in the rest of the metropolitan area.

As is the case with any new movement, a wide range of governmental mechanisms fall under the broad umbrella of regionalism. The spectrum runs from the loosest voluntary grouping of existing governmental agencies to meet and talk to each other, to a regional umbrella agency that has both planning and implementing powers in certain functional areas that affect the region as a whole.

As long as regionalism remains merely a voluntary collection of existing governmental agencies in a given metropolitan area, and does not include any mandatory powers, very few hard issues emerge as to how the regional body should be constituted. The evidence suggests, however, that it is also true that very few solutions to the tough problems of metropolitan areas come from such voluntary associations.

THE FUTURE of regionalism, it seems clear, will involve a movement from the voluntary association stage to mandatory planning and implementation powers. When this happens, a number of questions about their composition and power become critical.

In assessing the issues that surround regionalism, one can list at least five

'Planning for the 1980 census: What are your suggestions?'

The decennial census is a major national undertaking. Census data are widely used in many important government, private and community programs.

The Census Bureau is now working on plans for the 1980 census and important decisions have to be made in the near future. For example, the full content of the basic census questionnaire must be determined by the spring of 1977 so further preparatory steps can be accomplished successfully.

There are many constraints on the census in terms of what and how much information can be collected and tabulated. The Bureau believes, however, that it is very important to obtain and review the recommendations of a wide range of users and potential users of decennial census data.

If you have any suggestions, questions or comments on the 1980 census, please send them to Director, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Wash., D.C. 20533.



DEGROVE

that have to be settled in one way or another. First of all, it must be decided whether the new regional agencies are to be primarily state agencies or primarily local agencies. What will be the relationship of the regional agencies to the state government and existing state agencies? What will be its relationship to existing local governments? The answer to these questions may go a long way toward determining how the governing board of regional agencies should be composed and what its boundaries and functional powers should be.

The question of boundaries is a difficult one. The possible choices are almost numberless. At least in one case that I have been in a position to observe closely, the issue has come down to a choice of drawing regional boundaries on essentially natural or river basin lines or drawing the boundaries along more traditional lines in urban planning involving trade areas, transportation patterns and other elements.

The question of governing board structure relates closely to the question of functional powers. Some regional agencies have had their boards composed by gubernatorial appointment. Obviously, this tends to link them more closely to state government.

Others have had the boards made up on an ex-officio basis from existing city, county or other local governmental units. Clearly this links them more closely to local governments. This particular approach is used in councils of governments and usually is associated with purely voluntary measures.

A third possibility is the election of a governing board for the regional agency from districts that do not necessarily follow the existing city or county boundaries. Thus an independent political structure is formed.

The contrast can be seen in metropolitan Toronto. The federal approach is used by having the governing board represented from those people who hold offices in existing cities in the metropolitan area. In the Greater London Council, the legislative body is elected from districts that are drawn without regard to borough lines and represent the people of the area, not governmental jurisdictions.

It seems safe to say that the issues of regionalism in all of its various forms ranging from the mildest voluntary council of governments to a thorough regional government capable of implementing regional wide plans, will dominate much of the discussion of metropolitan politics for many years.

Regionalism is emerging in many different forms but it is emerging in one form or another in almost every section of the nation. Tough and difficult questions still must be answered as this new level of government comes into being. Its relationship to existing state governments, to existing city and county governments, to existing special districts of various kinds—none of these are clear or settled at the present time.

The effect of regionalism on the newly emerging power of Blacks in the central cities is a source of much alarm to many Black leaders. There may be opportunities, however, for maintaining Black political power in central cities and developing a regional approach at the same time. Black leaders need to be evidencing more interest in this approach now than they have in the past.

The federal government, states and even some existing local governments seem ready to leave behind the mild and bland voluntary regionalism that has characterized most past efforts. However, as one moves from voluntary efforts to regional agencies with political muscle, a whole host of difficult questions emerge that we have examined in this article.

Successful answers to these questions may hold the key to whether the United States can cope with the urban crisis in such a way as to ensure a just society where the quality of life is at a level that is at least aspired to by most Americans.