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REPORT OF THE
URBANISM COMMITTEE
TO THE
U.S. NATIONAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

REPORT TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AUGUST 9, 1937

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P.81 - TAX COLLECTORS

NATIONAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

INTERIOR BUILDING

WASHINGTON

August 9, 1937

The PRESIDENT,
The White House,
Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

We have the honor to transmit herewith a report on "Our Cities—Their Role in the National Economy." In the foreword of this report we have reviewed the extensive materials gathered by our Urbanism Committee and selected from their recommendations those suggestions for action which we approve in principle.

In previous reports of the National Resources Committee, much attention has been given to the problems of rural America. The report of the Urbanism Committee is the first major national study of cities in the United States where over half of our people live and where a large proportion of the Nation's wealth and the Nation's problems are concentrated. The Urbanism Committee is headed by Clarence Dykstra, formerly City Manager of Cincinnati, and includes Louis Brownlow, of the Public Administration Clearing House, Arthur C. Comey, of Harvard University, Charles W. Eliot, 2d, Harold D. Smith, of the Michigan Municipal League, Dr. M. L. Wilson, Under Secretary of Agriculture, and Louis Wirth, of the University of Chicago. Mr. L. Segoe served as Director for the study.

Sincerely yours,

HAROLD L. ICKES,
Secretary of the Interior, Chairman.

HARRY H. WOODRING,
Secretary of War.
HENRY A. WALLACE,
Secretary of Agriculture.
DANIEL C. ROPER,
Secretary of Commerce.
FRANCES PERKINS,
Secretary of Labor.

HARRY L. HOPKINS,
Works Progress Administrator.
FREDERIC A. DELANO.
CHARLES E. MERRIAM.
•
HENRY S. DENNISON.
BEARDELEY RUMI.

authorities have shown an appreciation of the community aspect of the terminal problem. Local planning commissions are practically the only public agencies which have concerned themselves thus far with the question of the proper place of transportation facilities in the community plan. Unfortunately, however, local planning agencies are without the necessary authority to bring city planning considerations to bear on the decisions of transportation companies, either directly or through the State or Federal regulatory agencies.

Urban Transit

Like transportation and terminal facilities, so urban transit and the policies and practices pursued in matters of rates and services, ownership, public regulation, location, and operation, have played a prominent part in determining the development of urban communities and regions. The growth of the urbanized area, the distribution of population and economic activities, land use, land values and the intensity of building development have all been materially influenced by local transit facilities. There is ample evidence to indicate that in spite of the new mobility which came with the general use of the private motor vehicle, the pattern of development of our urban areas still bears the marked imprint of our past transit policies and practices which gave little or no consideration to the interest of the community as a whole. The maladjustments to which past transit policies have contributed include over-concentration of population and of extremely high real estate values in some areas, undue dispersion, vacant land, and falling property values in others, excessive cost of public services resulting from these conditions, and difficulties in the transaction of business, including traffic congestion with all of its attendant wastes, hazards, and inconveniences.

The central problem is therefore how to utilize the instrument of urban transit as an effective tool in furthering the desirable development and redevelopment of urban places and regions in accordance with long-range, comprehensive, community plans.

Urban Planning and Zoning

Although city planning and zoning as practiced during the past 20 years has, by and large, been beneficial, it has fallen short of expectations and potentialities. It has been, and still is, handicapped by a combination of obstacles, the removal of which is held to be fundamental to really effective and successful urban planning and zoning.

To begin with, city planning bodies lack sufficient legal powers to guide effectively the physical, social, and economic structure of the community through the instrumentality of a comprehensive plan broadly con-

strued. They are subject to uninformed official and public opinion which does not fully appreciate the great importance of community planning. They often encounter jealousy and even opposition on the part of administrative departments. They suffer from insufficient appropriations and a scarcity of competent technical planning personnel. They are themselves sometimes at fault, because they lack sincere interest and vigor in performing their task of which they often have but a limited understanding or a narrow view.

- Even where legal powers and planning practices are most advanced, local planning agencies seldom have even advisory authority over *all* public works projects within the area under their jurisdiction, but are limited to projects of their own local government. Nor do they have such authority over the facilities of transportation, transit, and utility agencies, except when the proposed changes directly affect a public facility or public property. Their powers over the layout of real estate subdivisions are inadequate to be fully effective and they are without authority to regulate the quantity of such subdivision developments. In general, local planning agencies need stronger and wider authority in order to exercise jurisdiction over all matters relating to community development, and, where a county or regional planning agency does not exist, not only within the municipal boundaries, but over the entire area now urbanized or likely to become so and as much of the region beyond as bears relation to the proper development of the urban community itself.

- Another weakness in local planning has been the absence of more general plans for larger areas—the region, the State and the Nation—which might have furnished a framework and much needed over-all controls for local effort.

- In fact, the entire scope and conception of local urban planning need broadening. While the influence of the physical environment upon the economic and social structure of the community is everywhere in evidence, planning agencies and planners have been slow to recognize and give proper emphasis to the social and economic objectives and aspects of planning and zoning. Studies of the economic base of the community, its soundness, deficiencies, and its prospects, and the need for a selective program of industrial development, have been almost completely overlooked. The pressing problem of housing has not received the attention from planning agencies that it deserves.

Local planning should be given or must gain for itself a place in the structure of government where it will be closer to the local legislative body, the chief executive and the administrative departments. A pos-

practice has been for the city to initiate a regulation, to develop technical standards for its enforcement, and to install an inspection service, and then for the State to step in, enact some of the standards set up by the city and take over the licensing powers and the licensing fees without, however, enforcing adequate standards or inspections itself.

Now that the Federal Government has embarked upon a policy under which it has enlarged the scope of its activities and relationships with reference to cities, the urban controls exercised by State governments will be supplemented in some instances with a new set of controls. If these could, at least for the larger cities, "short circuit" the States, the administrative relationships which are growing up would not seem so complicated. But again our existing constitutional system may militate against direct Federal-city relationships.

Governmental Disorganization of Metropolitan Regions

As has already been pointed out, the process of urbanization has brought larger aggregates of population and wider areas within the orbit of a central dominant city. In continuing to treat the city as a municipal corporation, however, we have obviously allowed the realities of today to be obscured by the artificial and often arbitrary administrative boundaries which are a heritage of the past. Taking only the largest urban areas, i. e. the 96 metropolitan districts containing 55 millions of people or 45 percent of our total population, it is found that the urban governmental system of these districts consists of a bewildering maze of overlapping authorities and of a growing number of suburban and satellite cities.

The multiplicity of governments in the metropolitan areas is best indicated by the fact that, besides a very large number of overlapping authorities, in 1930 there were 272 separate incorporated places in the New York-Northeastern New Jersey metropolitan district, 135 in the Pittsburgh district, 115 in the Chicago area, 92 in the Philadelphia district, and 56 in the Los Angeles district. Together with their over-layers of counties, townships, school districts, sanitary districts, sewer districts, library districts, health districts, park districts, forest preserve districts, street lighting districts, utility districts, water districts, and even mosquito-abatement districts—each of them a separate body politic and corporate—these communities present an odd picture of independent bailiwicks performing related or even identical governmental functions with some degree of cooperation, but with a great degree of competition for municipal revenues, for administrative prestige and for legal powers. Frequently, these districts are too small in area or have insufficient tax resources to support essential public services. All this

governmental duplication, confusion and localism are in sharp contrast to the obvious disregard of the network of urban boundary lines by epidemics which complicate urban health work, by criminals who are not stopped by city limits, and by the city and suburban users of highways and transportation facilities who seldom know or care about the maze of political boundaries in metropolitan districts.

The whole problem is aggravated by the customary legal difficulties in applying the earlier, and now unusual, solutions of annexation, consolidation, and federation of metropolitan authorities and suburbs, and in utilizing the more frequent and current devices of special metropolitan authorities, intermunicipal and extra-territorial contractual and functional relations, and interstate and Federal arrangements.

On the latter point in particular, the difficulty is not merely in the lack of urban imagination or in the restraints of State law, but again it lies in the fact that the legal pattern of the nation consists of sovereign States and subordinate cities, while the concrete facts of our urban and administrative life defy State lines and State control. Twenty-two metropolitan districts containing 26,000,000 people, more than one-half of our metropolitan inhabitants and over one-fifth of our total population, straddle State lines. Since many of our cities are located along navigable rivers and since such rivers also generally serve as boundaries between States, it is to be expected that as some of these cities grow they will increasingly transcend the political units of which they are a part. For rivers, while they divide areas politically, generally unite them economically. But these populous urban regions and their administrative problems receive scant recognition in the existing machinery of our States and our National Government.

In their daily or periodic contacts the inhabitants of the metropolitan region, irrespective of municipal, township, county, State, or even national lines, are bound together into a community through industry, public utilities, social and cultural institutions, an interdependent system of transportation and communication, the newspaper, radio, telephone, and postal service, if not through a sense of social solidarity and common interests arising out of common problems. The greatest obstacle to the full emergence of a metropolitan community is the great number of conflicting and overlapping political and administrative units into which the area is divided. It is to be expected that as cities grow, an increasing proportion of their population will be found outside of their official boundaries. In fact, in the highly urbanized areas of the North Atlantic seaboard, even the different metropolitan regions shade almost imperceptibly into one another, constituting a vast aggregation or a super-

metropolis. Under such circumstances, the daily interrelations of the population are so far flung spatially and so intimate socially and economically that the official place of residence of the person scarcely defines the locus of his actual interest. In these areas with their concentration of population, commerce, and industry, their convergence of lines of transportation and communication, where mobility is high and spatial separation great, government, since it is not unified, is heavily taxed in dealing with the problems and functions that in smaller communities are not present, or are easily solved. In view of the relative inflexibility of political and administrative areas, the necessity of cooperation among and integration of the separate units of government has led to the development of *ad hoc* governments and to the increasing demand for greater freedom to deal adequately with the task of planning the physical structure and the functional coordination of the government constituting the region.

- X • Unless, therefore, the boundaries of the political city can be stretched to include its suburban and satellite industrial and residential colonies, the economic and social base, upon which rests the welfare of both those who remain in the city and those who seek a partial escape from it, will eventually disintegrate. For no community in a democratic society can long remain a sound functioning organism, if those among its members who gain the greatest benefits from it, escape from most of the obligations communal life imposes, and if those who obtain the least returns in the way of the necessities and amenities of life are left to bear the brunt of civic responsibility and taxation.
- If an orderly development and a higher level of life for the people of the imposing supercities are to be attained, some measures calculated to endow them with the capacity to act collectively as a political unit are indispensable.

Inadequate Municipal Cooperation

Although a large number of voluntary quasi-governmental associations of cities and of city officials have grown up in the United States to fill the gaps in our legal framework of urban powers, procedures and personnel, our cities have not taken full advantage of these forms of collaboration on a national scale.

— Certain States, for example, lack leagues of municipalities, and large cities do not take full advantage of the services offered by the national organizations of urban professional and policy officials. Finally, collaboration among municipalities and the clearing of ideas and coordination of programs have not developed as rapidly as would seem to be justified by the significant national role now being played by the de-

velopment of associations and conferences in the field of municipal government.

Personnel Problems

While the cities themselves are responsible for some of the obstacles to the development of a skilled municipal career service, for the systematic evasion of the civil service laws in some cities, for the failure to set up or revise classification and salary plans, for the occasional recurrence of inept or irresponsible personnel and leadership in some of the country's largest cities, or for official tolerance of certain conditions bordering upon corruption within the city hall and favoritism and racketeering in law enforcement outside—still State authorities must bear the largest share of the responsibility for the continuance of those provisions of the State laws which foster such distortions of the municipal service.

The continued existence of those State constitutions and State laws which foster large numbers of elective urban officers, ranging from judges to county surveyors; short elective terms and blanket ballots which burden and confuse even the most informed and well-meaning voters; the system of appointing deputies and employees on the basis of their ability to corral votes rather than to administer municipal affairs; the hesitancy of some of the most urbanized States to enact permissive legislation involving such forward-looking personnel devices as the city manager system (which today under the existing laws cannot be adopted in one-third of our municipalities of over 1,000 inhabitants); the retention of rigid residence requirements preventing the free flow of expert and trained officials between city and suburb, city and overlapping county, city and State, city and Nation, and even between one city and a sister city dealing with essentially the same problems—these cannot be glibly attributed to the shortcomings of our urban communities, for they are conditioned by and are inherent in the whole body of existing State law.

Tax Tangles

The confusion and inadequacies of American municipal finance arise in large part from unplanned and uncoordinated State financial control. The city is forced to depend upon the shrinking general property tax as the major source of municipal income, while the State has been preempting most of the newer sources of taxation and of the available public revenues. It is true that cities have in many instances been ineffective in local tax administration. On the other hand, the States have continued to handicap the cities by doling out under strict and sometimes arbitrary regulations grants-in-aid and local shares of State-col-

(1) *The Congress should enact legislation to establish a permanent National Resources Board⁹ with the necessary authority to engage, among other things, in the following activities:*

(a) *To continue and extend encouragement, cooperation, and support to State, regional, and local planning agencies.*

(b) *To continue, systematize, and improve the long-range programing of public works in cooperation with State, regional, and local planning agencies.*

(c) *In cooperation with industry and labor to establish an industrial planning section which is to develop, in collaboration with State planning boards, a better balanced and socially more desirable national industrial pattern, possibly a national zoning plan for industry, and through such industrial planning section, to lend encouragement and cooperation to industrial communities and regions in their efforts to improve the soundness and stability of their industrial structures.¹⁰*

(d) *To prepare, in collaboration with State planning boards, the broad, general plan of a coordinated national transportation system directed toward an economically more effective and socially more desirable urban pattern¹¹ and distribution of economic activities.*

(e) *To make a further inquiry into the probable effect on urbanization of the wider distribution of electric power.*

(f) *To establish a section for urban research which should perform for urban communities functions comparable to those now performed for rural communities by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering.¹²*

(2) *The Standard City Planning Enabling Act¹³ should be revised to give official local urban planning agencies the same authority over projects in the areas within their jurisdiction which are constructed, authorized, or aided by any other local authority or State agency, as is provided for projects of their own local government. There should be included in such jurisdiction the proposals before State regulatory agencies over transport and utility matters when these involve the location, extension, or change in the use of facilities.*

(3) *State legislation should be enacted in conformity with this revised Standard City Planning Enabling Act*

⁹ The establishment of such a board has been recommended by the President's Committee on Administrative Management.

¹⁰ See also recommendations under "Articulation of the National and Local Industrial Structure", p. 77.

¹¹ See also recommendations under "Transportation and Other Public Utilities", p. 78.

¹² See also recommendations B under "Urban Reporting and Research", p. 83.

¹³ Prepared in 1926 by the Advisory Committee on City Planning and Zoning of the Department of Commerce.

to permit the organization in all urban communities and metropolitan regions of an official planning agency vested with adequate authority effectively to guide and improve, through the instrumentality of a comprehensive city or regional plan broadly construed, the physical environment and social and economic conditions in these areas. Such State enabling legislation should give urban planning authorities effective powers over the quantity and quality of real estate subdivisions, and over the zoning of unincorporated areas in the urban regions. The functions of zoning agencies, where these bodies are separate, should be transferred to the official planning agencies.

(4) *A policy should be adopted by the Federal Government requiring that all Federal agencies submit to the official local planning body, if such exists, for its review and recommendation, the plans of all physical projects to be located in the area under the jurisdiction of such local planning body which are to be constructed, aided, or authorized by the Federal Government. These Federal agencies should consider such recommendations and should be guided in their actions by the same minimum requirement as apply under State laws or local charters to the local authorities. Included among the Federal agencies that are thus to submit their proposals to such local planning bodies should be the existing or future regulatory agencies for transportation and other public utilities when the proposals of these agencies involve the location, extent, or change in the use of facilities.*

Modernizing Urban Government

Despite the numerous improvements made in municipal administration during the past few decades a number of major defects still handicap the Nation's system of urban government. If the urban community is to face effectively its growing governmental responsibilities, its powers and its structure must be enlarged and modernized to meet its duties and practical functions in the modern world.

To enable urban government effectively to discharge its increasing responsibilities, the Committee recommends that State laws and constitutions should be revised and amended in accordance with the most advanced practices in order to:

(a) *Permit urban communities to exercise a wider range of home-rule powers not only over their own internal organization and management but also over the emerging problems of urban life;*

(b) *Permit a more flexible classification of cities, and an appropriate distinction between the wider powers essential to urban or metropolitan communities and the*

less extensive powers required by the remaining local authorities of the State;

(c) Facilitate the elimination in metropolitan areas of atrophied authorities like the township, and foster consolidation and cooperation among local urban governments.

Metropolitan Districts

With nearly one-half the people in the United States living in metropolitan districts which straddle local boundaries and in many instances State boundaries as well, there is urgent need for a reconsideration of the governmental management and structure of these emerging centers of urban life. Proper conduct of metropolitan affairs requires an enlargement and development of local governmental areas, powers, and techniques, irrespective of the political boundary lines which crisscross these complex urban districts.

In order to make the political and administrative structure of these metropolitan districts correspond more closely to their economic and social unity, and to solve the difficult problem of coordinating the activities of the great variety of independent authorities governing these urban areas, the Committee recommends that:

(1) The Congress should pass legislation giving previous blanket consent to the adoption of interstate compacts enabling the several communities within the same metropolitan region but in separate States to deal jointly with the regional aspects of health, sanitation, industrial-waste regulation, the control of public utilities, planning, public safety and welfare, education, and other governmental functions of regional scope.

As an experiment, the Federal Government should cooperate with the States of Maryland and Virginia and make use of the unique opportunity to devise a complete scheme of integrated metropolitan government for the District of Columbia and the urbanized outlying areas within this metropolitan district.

(2) Special legislation should be enacted by the States which would permit a reduction or federation or consolidation of overlapping and suburban authorities, easier annexation of territory to the city, joint services among neighboring cities through contractual relations, and intermunicipal cooperation in the conduct of metropolitan problems of all sorts.

Cooperation Among Municipalities

Until recently urban governments have not utilized the potential advantages obtainable through continuous cooperation among cities. Promising opportunities for improving the quality and reducing the unit cost of services rendered by urban government are

now available through the activities being developed by State leagues of municipalities, by national municipal associations, mayors' conferences, and by professional organizations of municipal officials, and in the cooperative effort now being made by these organizations toward the improvement of public administrative management and the raising of professional standards in public administration. The activities of these organizations relate to such matters as personnel, finance, and taxation, purchasing, planning, welfare, police, fire, public works and utilities, municipal research, housing, education, and recreation.

Because of the significant services now being made available to urban and other local governments by various State and National associations of municipalities and of municipal officials,¹⁴ the Committee urges governmental authorities on all levels, Federal, State, and local, to make the greatest possible use of the facilities of these associations.

Federal-City Relations

Many of the governmental functions essential to urban life cannot be carried on effectively without the participation of government on the State and Federal levels. During the recent emergency period the curtailment and partial break-down of certain essential local governmental services has accentuated the dependence of the city on the Federal Government. In the course of these relationships, problems have been raised which indicate the urgent need of improving and facilitating collaboration between cities and the Federal Government, either directly or through the State as an intermediary.

In order to clarify and formulate a Federal policy toward cities and to facilitate the administrative coordination of Federal services to cities, the Committee recommends that:

(1) Immediate consideration should be given to the urgent necessity of coordinating both at Washington and in the field the related services and activities performed by the various Federal agencies operating in urban areas. A prompt and thorough study should, therefore, be undertaken by a division of administrative research in the Bureau of the Budget¹⁵ of the best methods and administrative techniques for bringing about the closer coordination of Federal activities in urban communities and for improving and facilitating collaboration between the cities and the Federal Government.

The Committee further recommends legislation creating a Federal credit agency authorized to make loans

¹⁴ See. *A Directory of Organization in the Field of Public Administration*, Public Administration Clearing House, 1936.

¹⁵ Such a division is suggested in the recent report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management.

and grants under adequate legislative safeguards to State and local governments for the purposes of public-works construction, acquisition or construction of public utilities, land purchases, and similar capital outlays, and for extending credit to these governments in periods of economic stress. At the same time, the Committee believes that direct Federal expenditures in cities should be reduced to a minimum.

Public Personnel

The expanding scope of public services and functions and the developing Nation-wide concern about urban affairs make great demands upon the competence and integrity of our public personnel. Unless the cardinal requirement of an able public service personnel is met, the best policies of government, national and local, may founder. Furthermore, a high standard of public personnel is necessary if the public service is to attain that degree of prestige which will attract persons of talent and capacity. Urban government requires technical training and administrative caliber of the same high type as other levels of government. In fact the Federal Government may find itself seriously handicapped in carrying out any program requiring local cooperation, if the personnel problems of urban government do not receive adequate attention.

The serious need of raising the competence and prestige of the urban public service leads the Committee to recommend that:

(1) States and urban communities availing themselves of Federal grants-in-aid should be required by the Federal Government to conform with minimum personnel standards under the merit system.

(2) The Federal Government should extend its present efforts in vocational training for public-service occupations.

(3) The United States Civil Service Commission should furnish eligible lists to local authorities at their request and prepare model personnel standards applicable to the same classes of positions on all levels of government.

(4) States and cities should foster the abolition of narrow residence requirements and other restrictive personnel practices and should encourage the development of a public career system in every city in the land.

(5) All public authorities should encourage the interchange of public personnel among the various levels of government.

Taxation

Attention is invited to the archaic and often conflicting or overlapping tax policies practiced by the

various levels of government, and to the havoc this creates in Federal, State, and local finance. The absence of a national tax program produces instability in the economic structure and creates great difficulties in the programming of public works and in any attempt at long-range financial planning on any level of government or by private industry.

Believing that there is urgent need for a thorough study of the whole structure of taxation, to allocate revenue sources properly and to bring them into relation with the functions appropriate to each level of government, the Committee recommends that:

(1) A comprehensive and thorough-going inquiry should be made by the National Tax Revision Council or other suitable agency of the entire subject of conflicting fiscal policies and taxation as practiced by the local, State, and Federal Governments.¹⁶ Special attention should be given to:

(a) The reconsideration of the policies which have resulted in arbitrary constitutional amendments or statutory limitations on the general property tax; and (b) the elimination of duplicate taxes and tax collectors.

(2) Such State laws or constitutional amendments should be passed as will enable cities to exercise incidental and excess condemnation in order to protect public improvements and to facilitate their financing.

(3) A thorough study should be made of the problem of special district assessments and the place of such assessments in the fiscal policies of the city. A study should also be made of the increment tax on real estate in lieu of special assessments, to see whether such a tax would make possible the financing of public improvements more nearly through tax revenue derived from the increased values which these improvements create, and whether such a tax would aid in combatting speculation in land.

Public Works Program ¹⁷

The urban community is recurrently afflicted by extreme fluctuations in industrial activities. Public works projects, which might have been instrumental in cushioning the effects of these fluctuations, could not be resorted to in the past by urban communities to any considerable extent because of the absence of long-range planning for such emergencies. In fact, communities in the past were least prepared to undertake public works programs when the need for them

¹⁶ Compare: See Report of the National Resources Committee on *Public Works Planning*, December 1936.

¹⁷ Compare: See Report of the National Resources Committee on *Public Works Planning*, December 1936.

was most pressing. In addition, to apply such programs effectively requires a coordinated attack on a wide front.

Since the Committee is convinced that if a public works program is to be brought into play as one of the means of minimizing the impact of business cycles on the cities and the Nation, such a program, in order to be most effective and of maximum social value, must be a part of a long-range, coordinated, Nation-wide program of public works; and, since such a program must in turn be based on carefully drawn long-term city, State, regional, and national plans of development, it recommends that:

(1) *A Nation-wide, coordinated, long-range program of planned public works should be developed by the Federal Government working in the closest cooperation with the State and local authorities. In this effort the planning agencies on all levels of government should be given a primary role.*

(2) *The Congress should establish a permanent Federal public works authority which should be directly responsible for the formulation and execution of a specific and detailed Nation-wide program of public works.*

This public works authority should administer any Federal loans and grants for public works to States and local agencies, negotiate the division of costs between the Federal Government and the other governmental bodies involved, and recommend the allotment of funds to Federal and non-Federal authorities. It should also be responsible for the approval of the engineering aspects of projects submitted by Federal, State and local authorities, for the preparation of standards and for the inspection necessary to safeguard Federal interests.

In its policies and the preparation of any specific program of public works it should be guided by the more general long-term program to be developed and kept up-to-date by the recommended National Resources Board.¹⁸ The actual making of loans and grants based on the recommendations of this public works authority should be the function of the national credit agency recommended elsewhere in this report.¹⁹

(3) *Local and State authorities should urge their departments and officials to cooperate with their respective planning agencies in the preparation of long-range public works programs in order to make effective the effort at a sound, Nation-wide, long-time public works policy.*

¹⁸ See also recommendations under "Planning", p. 78.

¹⁹ See also recommendations under "Federal-city Relations", p. 80.

• Urban Reporting and Research

In carrying out the task assigned to it the Urbanism Committee has been faced continually with serious shortcomings and gaps in the official Federal information concerning cities. The Committee has been impressed by the fact that, in the face of the rise of the city to a place of preponderant significance in the national economy and of the urgent problems of recent time, the reporting of urban information has relatively retrogressed in scope, comparability and periodicity. The Committee finds the paucity of reliable knowledge about urban life to be a severe handicap in coping with national problems.

The urban community constitutes a neglected field in governmental reporting. On a large range of topics, relating to some of the most basic facts of urban life and including questions of urgent interest and frequent recurrence, no adequate data exist at the present time. Where there are some facts relevant to these questions they are often subject to one or a combination of the following shortcomings:

(1) The material is available for only one or at best a few points in time and is not collected in accordance with sufficiently uniform standards to permit the ascertaining of trends.

(2) Frequently the data are not recent enough for application to current problems.

(3) The information, while often adequate for a few selected cities or for cities of a certain size, location or type, does not cover all cities, or a sufficient number of them, to permit its use on a national scale.

(4) The data are available in a form which defies comparison between cities and between metropolitan regions.

(5) Comparable facts about urban and rural communities are not available.

(6) Almost always the specific facts available from different Federal agencies on a given subject are not available in such form that they can be brought into relation even with other data about the same city because of the specialized functions of the agencies collecting them.

(7) While sometimes available about the city as a corporate entity, the data in most cases cannot be had for the actual urbanized area or metropolitan district.

(8) The information has been collected, tabulated, or published for States, counties, or units other than cities, and can only be approximated for the city.

(9) Even for the largest cities, Census data are in most cases not available by sufficiently small and permanent areal units to make possible an analysis of conditions and their trends in various parts of the city.

A. The Committee believes that these deficiencies in the adequacy, consistency, and comparability of information about urban places can be and should be remedied. To this end it recommends that:

(1) A division of urban information should be created in the Bureau of the Census which would serve as a central depository and clearing house of all information about urban communities collected by all governmental agencies on all levels and by authoritative private organizations.

It should be a part of this division's duty to assemble this information in such manner as to make it readily usable for studying individual communities as well as the actually urbanized areas and metropolitan districts as a whole. This division should have the further duty of performing such statistical reporting from urban places as does not seem more appropriately assignable to another Federal agency.

The division could also be charged with the duty of coordinating State and local statistical work with Federal fact-collection in those fields where this is not already done. The division might well assist State and local authorities by supplying standard forms. It might desirably encourage the collection of data about nongovernmental subjects not collected at present by municipal governments. In order to further the cooperative collection of data by the several levels of government on standardized forms and by uniform procedures, consideration might be given to the extending of Federal grants-in-aid to State and local authorities. State or regional offices of the recommended division of urban information should be associated, wherever feasible, with State leagues of municipalities.

It is suggested that the proposed division of urban information be created by expanding the functions of the existing Division of Financial Statistics of States and Cities, since this division of the Census Bureau already has well-established relationships with municipal governments, possibly by developing the program of the recently established municipal reference library and information service of the Bureau.

(2) The Central Statistical Board, in the exercise of its present powers, should give special consideration to the above-enumerated inadequacies in the existing data and the shortcomings in the methods of collecting them.

This Board should draw up, in consultation with local public officials, their national associations, State leagues of municipalities, university research centers, and national research bodies, a program for extending and improving the reporting of urban statistics. Such a program should take cognizance of the suggestions of

the interim report of this Committee in respect to data which need to be collected from municipal governments.²⁰ In addition it is desirable that such a program should include such important specific data as:

(a) Census data on: Place of work or place of daily activity (in addition to place of residence); length of residence at present location; place as well as State from which last migrated; grade completed in school; rental paid per room and number of persons in families paying specified rents.

(b) A continuous inventory of employment and unemployment.

(c) Family income, cost of living, and the consumption of goods and services.

(d) Complete data about industries located in urban communities and regions, such as would make possible a thorough analysis of the industrial structure of these areas and the preparation of selective programs of industrial development.

Without waiting for the reorganization of urban reporting along the lines above indicated, the following steps should be taken immediately:

(e) The collection of financial statistics of cities of 30,000 and over should be resumed.

(f) The collection of local documents, recently undertaken by the Bureau of the Census as an emergency project, should be made a continuing practice, the documents to be filed with the proposed division of urban information. A monthly check list of such documents should be published, covering at least cities of 30,000 and over.

(g) The present decennial population census should be made a quinquennial census.

(h) The method of collecting data in urban communities by permanent census tracts (instead of by the changeable wards and precincts), should be extended in its use to all of the metropolitan districts, covering in each case the whole metropolitan area.

B. With special reference to research in urban problems, the Committee recommends that a central agency for urban research should be established as a section in the proposed National Resources Board²¹ to perform for urban communities functions comparable to those now performed for rural communities by the Bureaus of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering. In addition to research of its own, the program of the

²⁰ See (a) Suggested Topical Outline of Subjects to be Covered under an Adequate Program of Reporting Urban Affairs.

(b) Suggested Minimum Schedule of Data Not Now Available Required for an Adequate Study of Certain Major Urban Problems.

Interim Report to the National Resources Committee by the Research Committee on Urbanism—National Resources Committee, July 1936.

²¹ See also recommendations under Planning, p. 78.

proposed research agency should include the stimulation of urban research in universities, research institutes, planning boards, and the furnishing of advisory and cooperative services for individuals and public and private bodies. Its program should include, more specifically:

(1) More specialized studies of sufficiently wide scope to demand Nation-wide attention, such as the diagnosis of the factors of unusually well-adjusted and markedly ill-adjusted urban communities; the underlying factors contributing to the failure of the urban community to reproduce itself; studies of municipal land-acquisition procedure; effect of population movements and of various types of public improvements on urban land values and land prices; experience with various methods of financing public improvements by added site values or ground rents created by such improvements; blighting effects of major traffic routes on residential property.

(2) A study aiming at a more realistic redefinition of the urban community and the metropolitan district for census purposes, and at a more usable classification of cities into size groups for the more discriminating reporting of the essential facts about each class.

(3) Periodic appraisals of the standard of existence in urban communities throughout the country; development, on the basis of such appraisals, of minimum acceptable standards for communities in different regions, of different types, sizes, etc.; and appraisal and evaluation, at specified intervals, of the conditions and the progress of urban life and the success or failure of policies and methods designed to deal with urban problems.²²

The Great Cities of Tomorrow

The concentration of so large a proportion of the urban population in extremely limited areas is wasteful of resources, time, and energy. The same would be true of undue dispersion. The Committee believes that the most desirable environment for the urban dweller and for the effective use of human and material resources is more likely to be found somewhere between these two extremes.

Wholesale decentralization, which is being advocated by some, does not seem to be compatible with the effective performance of the economic and cultural role of the urban community in the life of the Nation. Neither does it appear practicable under the existing organization of urban economic activity, because it would involve the scrapping of more of our existing

equipment than we could afford. Widespread dispersion would be wasteful also because it would probably increase the cost of production and distribution and the cost of providing public facilities and services, thus rendering the attainment of a higher standard of material and cultural well-being more difficult for the whole population.

Dislocations, maladjustments, and other defects and deficiencies in the urban structure, congestion and excessive land prices, slums, blighted residential areas and deteriorating business sections, as well as premature or unnecessary subdivisions—and the economic losses and social ills resulting therefrom—are the price of inadequate attention to the development and welfare of the community as a whole—of not planning—and may be found in almost every large urban area. Serious as these defects may be, it is believed that they are but blemishes or infections which an otherwise healthy organism can check and which can be removed without danger to complete recovery.

Provided the urban community possesses a fundamentally sound economic base and has a site the disadvantages of which are not too costly to overcome, the Committee is of the opinion that the realistic answer to the question of a desirable urban environment lies not in wholesale dispersion, but in the judicious reshaping of the urban community and region by systematic development and redevelopment in accordance with forward-looking and intelligent plans. In this, advantage would be taken of the natural trends in the shifting of industry between established industrial areas and its diffusion within such areas, of the drift of population from congested central districts to outlying sections, of the improved means of transit and the general fluidity of the population—to loosen up the central areas of congestion and to create a more decentralized metropolitan pattern. Such a moderately decentralized and yet integrated urban structure should have greater stability and should offer economies in production and in the provision of public facilities and services. It may be expected to extend the material and cultural advantages of urban life to a larger number of the population; to allow them to enjoy the benefits of a more healthful environment and a richer personal and communal life; and to offer to the lower income groups the possibility of the somewhat less tenuous existence afforded by village and small-town living.

A reasonable set of conditions for the attainment of a desirable urban community sketched in these broad terms would doubtless include a sound, well-balanced industrial structure; a rather compact community pattern but with ample light and air and adequate streets, recreational and other public spaces available in all sections; a balanced development free

²² See also recommendations under Depressed Cities and Industries, p. 73.

of building, population, or traffic congestion; a relatively stable and reasonable level of land values without excessively high or falling values, and with all the land in efficient and socially desirable use; and a minimum of obsolescence. The realization of a community with such characteristics can be furthered, among other means, by the organization of the urban area as a whole into neighborhoods and satellite communities, each of which provides for a maximum of opportunity to care for the daily activities and needs of its inhabitants, each of which possesses a social and political coherence which can arouse and hold community loyalty and participation, inspire responsible civic leadership, and can perform effectively its specialized function in the metropolitan region. Thus the eco-

nomie and cultural advantages of the great city will be further enhanced by the physical and social stability and unity which some have thought was obtainable only in a simple society. Thus also, the benefits of modern civilization which the great city has brought to an ever-increasing proportion of our people may be extended and increased.

The approach toward this type of urban community and a more satisfactory urban life will require much better appreciation and understanding of the city and its distinctive problems, greatly improved governmental organization and wider powers, and far more fundamental and much more effective planning on all levels of government.