

REGIONALISM

THE PHILADELPHIA CONNECTION: IS IT A NEW IDEA?



1.0 THREE GENERATIONS OF PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL PLANNERS

In 1963, Regional visionary John W. Bodine was quoted:

*"A massive citizen effort such as we have had in the last twenty-five years in Philadelphia has two distinct stages, only the second of which brings into play the power elite—The people who are active in the first stage are not members of the power elite—They are the indispensable one-hundredth of one percent—They are the public-spirited non-prestigious workers in the civic vineyard, who have the time and patience to study through the vexing questions, to sort out the alternatives to make the solutions they arrive at respectable and even commonplace, and thus prepare the way to usher in the second stage **when the power elite can take over.**"¹
(emphasis ours)*

With these words, Bodine succinctly stated what may be considered as the Regional Planners' Creed: That there exists a distinct class of cosmopolitan elite, decreed by destiny to carry the burden of governing the affairs of mere mortals, while condescending to allow just enough "citizen involvement" so that the lower classes think that they have some control over their own affairs.

Actually, the Regional planners in Philadelphia think in even more succinct, if less poetic terms: They think it's their job to run things for the "country bumpkins" in the counties, and that it's only fair to make a few dollars for their city in return.

The following chronology, by no means complete, provides an overview of "Regional planning" and "Intergovernmental Cooperation" as espoused to us, over a period of many years, by our helpful Regional friends from Philadelphia. You may find it useful the next time a Regional planner from Philadelphia - or if one of your county Regionalists - approaches you with "new ideas" for Intergovernmental Cooperation.

1923 The City Club of Philadelphia, an organization of wealthy and powerful Main Line families hardly qualifying as mere "workers in the civic vineyard," meets to consider, Should the Region be **allowed** to grow in a hit-or-miss fashion? Not surprisingly, as businessmen they favor a Comprehensive Regional Plan, with their city and its businesses as its hub. ²

1925 The Regional Planning Federation of the Tri-State Metropolitan Area is organized. ³

1927 The Federation presents preliminary findings, **but notes regretfully** "a decided sentiment in the outlying communities for local autonomy." ⁴

1928 Philadelphia business and civic organizations raise a fund of \$600,000 to pay for surveys, studies, and preparation of a comprehensive Regional plan. To administer this fund, these workers-in-the-civic-vineyard incorporate the Regional Planning Federation of the Philadelphia Tri-State District. Its charter is to **"ignore political boundaries."** ⁴

1932 The Regional Plan of the Philadelphia Tri-State District is issued, listing Samuel P. Wetherill, Jr. as Chairman and including Samuel T. Bodine on the Executive Committee. It contains a map which shows proposed boundaries of governance for the Tri-State area (figure 1). **True to its charter, it ignores political boundaries**, spanning three states but keeping Philadelphia as its center. It also contains a map

showing proposed Regional Governments in other areas of the northeastern United States (figure 3) indicating with amazing accuracy the boundaries of Regional Governments which would take another thirty to forty years to achieve (see Section 2.0). Allegheny and Lancaster Counties are shown clearly as part of the plan. 4

1932 In response to an already apparent exodus from Philadelphia to the suburbs, the city makes an early move to capture suburban dollars through passage of the Sterling Act, making the Philadelphia Non-Resident Wage Tax possible. It will eventually result in many suburbanites paying more taxes to Philadelphia than they pay to their home municipalities and the state **combined!**

1952 Philadelphia adopts its Home Rule Charter, splitting its finances into an operating and a costly five-year capital budget. The total budget soars, and the city gains a renewed interest in Regional cooperation. 5

1956 Philadelphia Mayor Richardson Dilworth proposes a Regional Transportation Organization to take over operation of all public transportation including taxis in the Tri-State Region. He openly states that his reason is to keep all Regional business flowing through Center City, for the good of the Region, of course. He threatens to start a city-operated bus company for the purpose of driving the privately owned Philadelphia Transportation Company (PTC) out of business by charging lower, taxpayer-subsidized fares. 6

1963 Dilworth's wish begins to materialize, as the Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) is formed.

1965 The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) is formed. The boundaries of its authority are **virtually identical to those proposed by the City Club of 1923** (figure 2). 7

1967 Richardson Dilworth tells the Plymouth Elementary School PTA he foresees "A Regional Government by the **end of the century** for the five counties on this side of the Delaware River and the two on the other side".[in New Jersey!] because "we cannot go on with these ridiculous, fragmented areas." 8

1968 A State Constitutional Convention is convened. Delegates from Philadelphia and other areas enthusiastically fall to the task of "modernizing local governments". Included will be:

- The enabling of Home Rule and Optional Plan government.
- The enabling of "Intergovernmental Cooperation," allowing municipalities to **transfer** their powers and functions to "other municipalities or districts, the Federal Government, any other state or its governmental units, or any newly created governmental unit."
- The enabling of "Area Government."
- Direction that the General Assembly shall enact legislation establishing a procedure for municipal "consolidation, merger, or change of boundaries."⁹

Notable among the delegates are James A. Michener, who serves as unofficial leader of a group of "independent" Republicans and Democrats fighting for a laundry-list of "reforms," Pittsburgh engineer and lawyer Richard L. Thornburgh, and Robert P. Casey. **Most** pro-"reform" delegates will be destined for a prosperous political future. 10

1968 Determined to achieve a regional monopoly on public transportation for SEPTA, Philadelphia politicians take advantage of public dissatisfaction resulting from a protracted transit strike to force a government takeover of the privately owned PTC. It's promised that a totally government operated system will be more efficient and cheaper than the PTC, which at the time is making a profit and paying over \$9 million annually in taxes, while charging among the lowest fares in the country. PTC's public

stockholders receive a fraction of the value of their shares. Ironically, it's promised that government operation will end labor disputes. 11

1971 Philadelphia Mayoral Candidate Thacher Longstreth says in a published interview, "whether it's done on the state or federal level, somebody is going to start telling these local regions how to conduct their welfare, education, and their medical programs, because the piper plays the tune." He continues, "We really effected the first regional government back in 1854 when Philadelphia **absorbed** a number of surrounding communities. In the same roundtable interview, Professor Paul N. Ylvisaker of Princeton says of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, **It's a federal instrumentality in effect.**" 12

1971 Philadelphia House Representative Eugene Gelfand proposes that the five-county Philadelphia area be "merged or integrated" to cope with pressing problems in education, pollution, sanitation and other fields. [Editor's note: It is interesting to look back almost two decades and question how really "pressing" the problems were, which supposedly only regional collectivization would solve.] 13

1971 The Delaware Valley Tri-State Compact (Tri-Pact) is proposed to control four major airports, six bridges across the Delaware River, the Lindenwald High-Speed Line, the Cape May-Lewis Ferry, and virtually any highway construction construed to be "regional". It is to be governed by 15 board members—5 appointed by the governor of each state. **No elected representation is considered.** 14

1972 In another roundtable interview, Thacher Longstreth as president of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce recommends cutting the taxes on Philadelphia business, but goes on to add, "Regionalism is something we have to have, and if we're not going to get it voluntarily, and chances are we are not, then I think it will call either for passage of state legislation or possibly federal legislation that will **force** regionalism upon us." 15

1972 Philadelphia Inquirer columnist George Wilson, who will make a career of writing the same pro-regionalism editorials weekly, for nearly eighteen years, writes "It is conceivable that some form of metropolitan government . . . could lie at the end of some home rule rainbow." He alludes to the boundary change legislation which the new state constitution mandated, and continues on to note that suburbanites will have to realize that they are all "members of the same community, irrespective of meaningless political boundaries that have long outlived whatever usefulness they may once have had." 16

1972 Noting the financial crisis existing in Philadelphia's schools, John R. Bunting, Chairman of the Board of the First Pennsylvania Bank, calls for a Philadelphia-Suburban Regional School Authority Plan, combining all 60 school districts in the five-county area into one. In return for "economies of scale," Bunting proposes that suburban schools turn their federal revenue sharing funds over to Philadelphia. 17

1973 Speaking on behalf of suburbanites that have yet to be identified, John R. Bunting says that "suburban residents would be willing to go along with a regional tax system to aid Philadelphia." 18

1973 Richardson Dilworth says that "Philadelphia, Bucks, Montgomery, and Delaware Counties should be consolidated under a regional government to solve the urban problems of the area." Asked, "Don't you think the suburban residents would be reluctant to take on the debts of the city?" he responds, "It [the consolidation] will have to be **imposed** by the legislature." 19

1975 Two of Philadelphia's top associations of "workers-in-the-civic vineyard," the Greater Philadelphia Movement and the Philadelphia Partnership, both made up of leading industrialists and civic leaders labeled as "socially concerned" by the Philadelphia Bulletin - combine to form the Greater Philadelphia Partnership. The papers call it a "super-civic agency" to "**call the tune** on regional betterment." 20,21

1976 Two urban mayors and bank chairman John Bunting meet and try a new tack, blaming the failure of regionalism on suburban racism. Bunting says the cities (York, Philadelphia and Trenton) are being denied "their political balance, social balance, and economic balance" by not being allowed to expand their tax bases to neighboring areas. Nevertheless, the three agree that the metropolitan areas are moving toward regionalism through "a combination of stronger county governments . . . and the Delaware Valley

Regional Planning Commission." (It is not reported that there is any discussion of ways to cut spending in the cities.) 22

1977 State Senator Craig Lewis introduces legislation which, would permit Philadelphia to **annex** part or all of contiguous Bensalem Township in Bucks County. Lewis will later claim credit for defeating his own legislation. 23

1978 John R. Bunting again brings forth a regional proposal. He sees use of suburbanites' tax dollars as a way to get them more involved in city affairs. He adds that "we need some means to **force**, persuade or entice a **marriage** between our cities and their suburbs," and suggests that public education be moved under federal control, with funding going to "regionalized" school systems. 24

1982 A study involving scores of prominent Philadelphians is conducted by Professor Theodore Hershberg, director of the Center for Philadelphia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Among its major conclusions is that "regionalism" is needed, **especially some form of regional government with taxing powers**. In part of the study package is included a "Philadelphia Prospectus," which recommends emulating Minneapolis, where seven counties and nearly 3000 square miles were annexed into a single regional government. (See Section 2.0 and Figure 4.) 25

1992 "People are still quoting the election rhetoric of Mayor Rendell, who suggested in an obscure section of his campaign literature that the city should sue for the power to **absorb** other municipalities if it can't get more state aid". (Philadelphia Inquirer, 9/6/92) (emphasis ours).

1994 Philadelphia Controller Jonathan Sidel said (on radio station WWDB FM, 9/12/94), "Regionalization is going to happen, **whether we like or or not.**"

While the above recital of regionalist rhetoric and strategy may seem lengthy, it serves a very important purpose. It demonstrates that the central goals of the 1923 Philadelphia regionalists have not changed in the least in over six decades. And in fact, their goals are for the most part coming to fruition with the help of the federal government. By offering to finance local projects through federal assistance programs, the federal government is inducing many units of government throughout the Philadelphia four county region to establish Regional Councils of Governments, (COGs) such as the DVRPC, and the Bucks County Consortium of Municipalities.

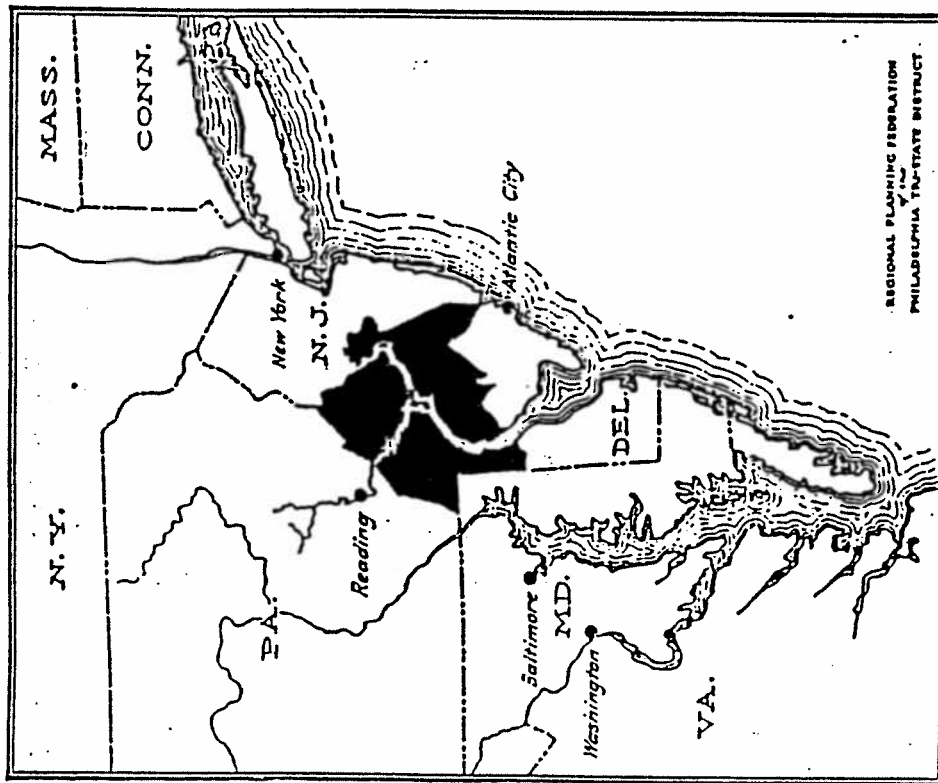
Professor Hershberg and his regionalist friends promise us that all we need in the five-county area is more "Intergovernmental Cooperative programs." We've heard that line before. The city crowd **foisted SEPTA** upon us - which was supposed to solve Southeast Pennsylvania's transportation problem, and a tax-paying private company was sacrificed and replaced with a tax-draining regional system in perpetual fiscal crisis. When will we learn?

It is interesting to note how often the use of **force** to accomplish regionalism has been called for, usually following a presentation describing the utopia awaiting everyone as soon as the rest of the state agrees to pick up the problems of the cities. Perhaps this is because even the regionalists see how blatantly one-sided their calls for "regional cooperation" are - "cooperation" being their term meaning a blank check handed to the cities, but **never** meaning any belt-tightening or fiscal austerity on their part. If they really are serious about solving their fiscal problems, they should begin by going after the federal government which continues to impose unfunded mandated programs upon them, such as the \$140 million dollar curbing program - to conform with the federal Disability Act.

Regionalism is being **imposed** upon us from the top down. There never has been, nor is there now, any grass roots demand for the proliferation of bureaucracy known as regionalism. It has been imprinted upon us from above by federal and state mandates, and by the compliance of our elected officials to threats of withholding federal and state funds. **Regionalism is not local control**; It is the channel through which federal control flows into your local government.

Yesterday's Plans - Today's Reality

Figure 1



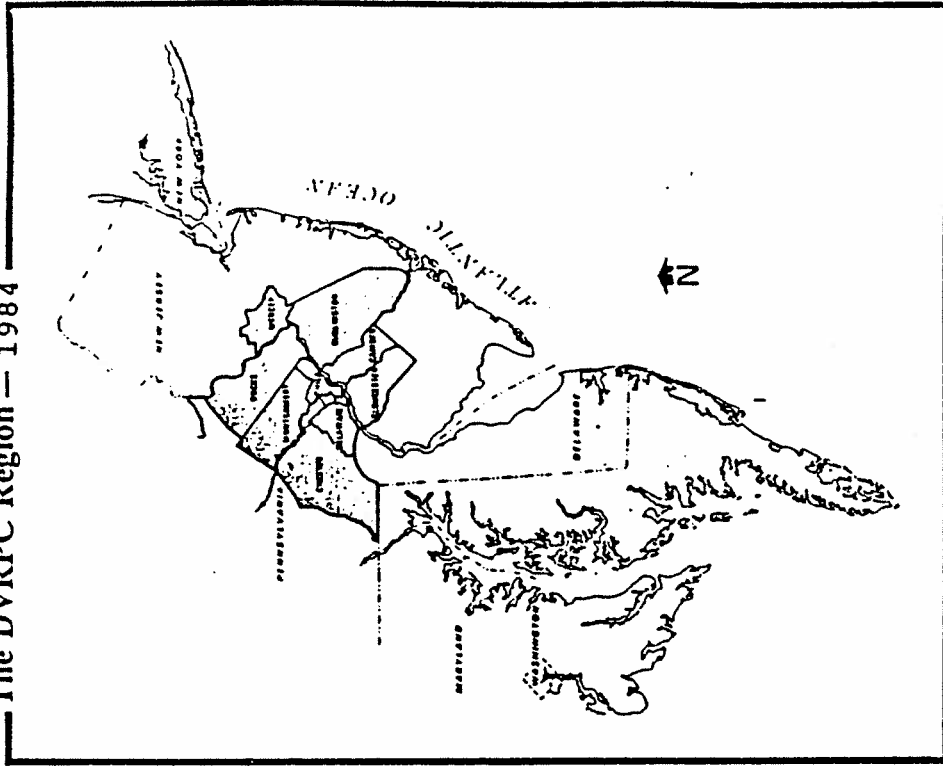
1928

LOCATION MAP OF THE TRI-STATE DISTRICT

The region is shown in black. It includes New Castle County, Delaware; Mercer, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties, New Jersey; and Bucks, Montgomery, Philadelphia, Chester and Delaware counties, Pennsylvania.

Figure 2

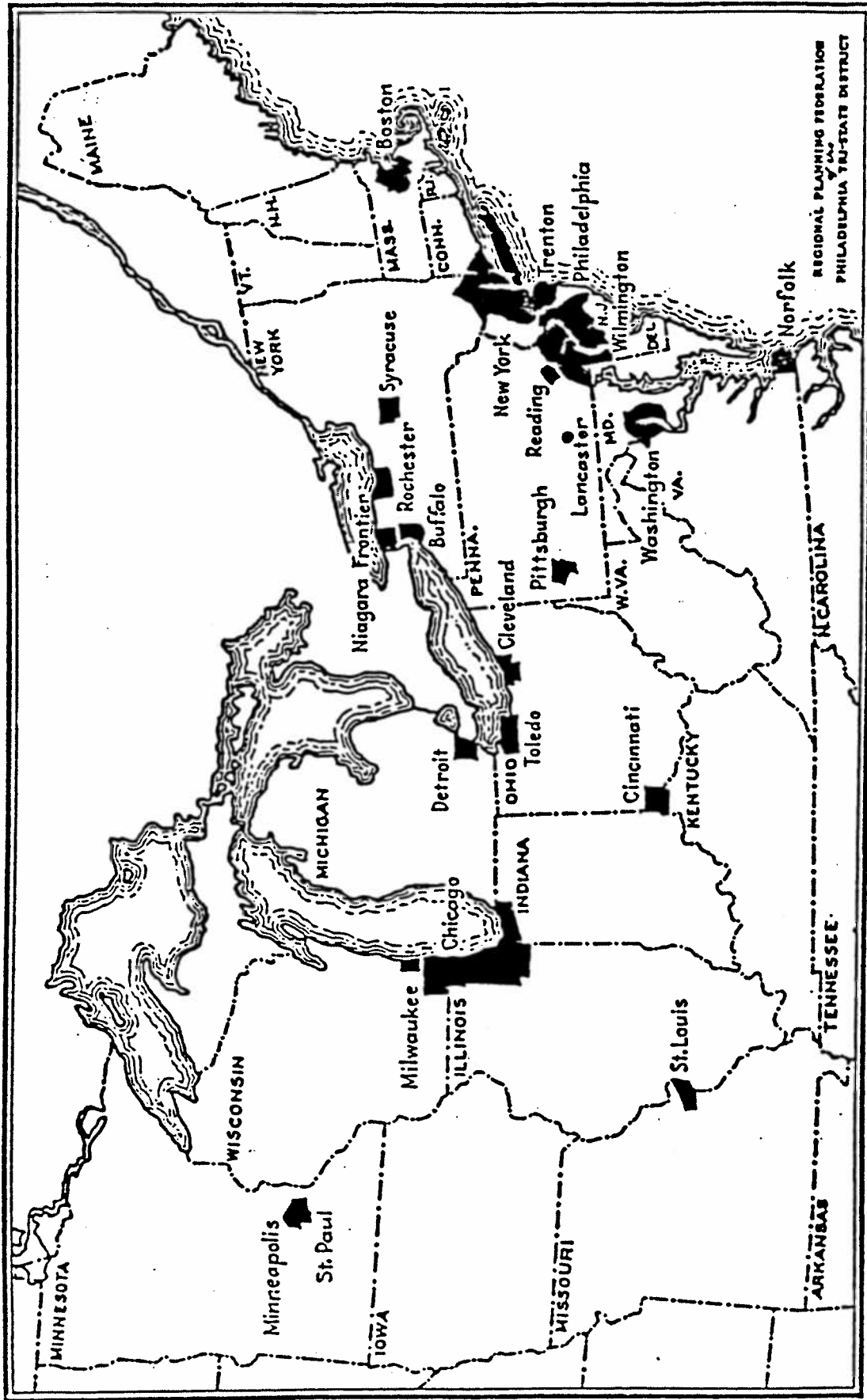
The DVRPC Region — 1984



It is interesting to note that all of this has been accomplished working from the top down. There never has been, or is there now, any grass roots demand for that proliferation of bureaucracy known as regionalism. It has been imprinted upon us from above by means of bureaucratic decrees, and by the compliance of our elected officials to threats of withholding federal funds.

DIGEST OF POLICIES, PROCEDURE AND FINDINGS

Figure 3



1928

TWENTY NORTHEASTERN REGIONS ARE PLANNING

Figure 4



INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY

Regional Commercial-Industrial Tax-Base Sharing to improve tax financing of services in the Delaware Valley making the entire region a more efficient place to do business and a more tax-equitable place to live.

NOTE:

This page is extracted from the "Philadelphia Investment Portfolio" of "Philadelphia, Past, Present, and Future" (Reference 33). The "Twin Cities Plan" refers to the Regional Government of Minneapolis-St. Paul, which in 1965 annexed seven counties, 3000 square miles, and two million people into a single Regional Government. It is ruled by one full-time and sixteen part-time officials, all **Appointed** by, and "serving at the pleasure of", the governor of Minnesota.

The vestiges of local governments must turn over 40% of tax revenues to the Regional Government for distribution according to "need".

EXPECTED RETURN

- Achieve equity in financing local services throughout the region, so that households with equal means are treated equally. (!)→
- Achieve equity in the financing of services so that citizens across the spectrum of incomes, from poor to rich are treated more fairly. (!)→
- Remove disincentives which discourage firms and households from locating in the potentially most economically productive locations.
- Promote gains in tax equity and economic efficiency as exemplified by program tried and proven successful in Minneapolis-St. Paul.
- Promote cooperation among local governments and agency economic development programs/efforts through sharing of benefits from new industrial and commercial development wherever it occurs.

SCHEDULE

- Immediately convene regional task force to review Twin City Plan and to develop specific local approach and implementation plan (1-3 months).
- Legislative action to be taken during current session as part of overall tax reform package for Delaware Valley.

FINANCING

- Revenues to be raised by a uniform regional tax on commercial-industrial property in the Delaware Valley.
- Revenues are rebated to local governments under revenue-sharing formulae which return funds to localities according to expenditure needs where needs are based upon services required by commercial-industrial establishments and by residents within each community.

POTENTIAL CLIENTS

- Citizens of Delaware Valley
- Local governments
- Local economic development agencies:

POTENTIAL VENTURERS

- Governments in Delaware Valley
- Pennsylvania State Legislature
- Pennsylvania Economy League
- Delaware Valley Citizens League
- League of Women Voters

FURTHER INFORMATION

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