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MODEL CITIES

By

Scott R. Johnson

It cannot be denied that cities are having problems. The headlines of any daily newspaper proclaim the dilemma of the city; crime, riots, pollution, taxes, bussing and urban sprawl. Each of these areas have been attacked by some agency, either federal or state, if they have been attacked at all. Working under the premise that it is better to concentrate on one part of an impasse instead of diversifying one's resources, President Lyndon B. Johnson in the Demonstration Cities Act of 1966 produced the "Great Society" reform of the model cities program.¹ It was one of the first programs designed to consolidate federal spending. The idea "was to focus the efforts of a broad range of Federal agencies on a few slum neighborhoods, involve the community itself in planning and directing programs, and thus demonstrate what could be done to salvage blighted areas."² Through the Model Cities program, an attempt has been made to solve the riddle of

¹"Muddle Cities," Newsweek, May 12, 1969, p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 63.

the decay of America's central cities.

The model cities program can be seen to be the catalyst to make the newly created Department of Housing and Urban Development achieve its purpose of "maximum coordination of the various Federal activities which have a major effect upon urban, suburban, or metropolitan development."³ This is also the policy of Model Cities, the coordination of Federal, State, local and private resources. The Assistant Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development "coordinates the actions required at Federal, State and local levels of government for the optimum integration and balance of component elements of Model Cities programs, and timely and coordinated delivery of the resources for these programs."⁴ Through his office, plans, money, and implementation procedures must pass before anything can be done.⁵ Besides synchronizing governmental levels of operation he

³Hubert H. Humphrey, "Making Cities Fit for People," Saturday Review, July 3, 1965, p. 17.

⁴National Archives and Records Service, Government Organization Manual, 1971/72 (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 354.

⁵"Heavy Fighting Shakes Model Cities," U. S. News and World Report, August 1, 1970, p. 65.

must also contend with the conflicting policies of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Education and Welfare, Interior, Justice, Labor, and Transportation.⁶ Each department contributes something to the program. The Agriculture Department provides food for schools; Commerce tries to find jobs and training for the unemployed; H.E.W. concerns itself primarily in the Model Cities program with housing; Justice deals with the administration of equal treatment before the law; the Transportation Department promotes means of moving people and the Department of the Interior coordinates the planning of the program on a national basis.⁷ It is believed that through this manner the duplication of energies will not occur and progress can be made.

The administration of the Model Cities program exists on four levels: Federal, State, local, and agency. The Federal facet of the program has already been mentioned. The States are encouraged to help the local committees by contributing financial and human resources.⁸ This can be through State aid to schools, state departments of Employment Security,

⁶U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Model Cities, The Model Cities Program: Questions and Answers (Washington, D.C., 1969), p. 5.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

employment of area specialists, and through the establishment or administration of other state agencies. The states pool the knowledge and experience of individual city projects, and future plans are based on past experiences.

Most of the authority and actual execution of the Model Cities program is done on local levels. The principal officer of the city is responsible for the program, i.e., the mayor, city council, or selectmen. The Model Cities agency in each community is a department of the city government, usually under the auspices of the Planning Board. It is through the functions of this Board that Model Cities achieves its objectives.⁹

One of the objectives of the program is the attack on the physical problems of blighted neighborhoods. A creation of a housing stock in the Model Cities area that includes sound units of all prices and rental ranges is one of the proposed priorities. Removal of substandard and rehabilitation of sound buildings must first be approved by the Board so as to align the target area project with that of the total picture of the city.

⁹Interviews with members of the planning board, Springfield, Massachusetts, February 7, 1972.

The organization of the Model Cities project is headed by the Model Cities Director, who is appointed by the leading local authority. The Director has a dual responsibility, to the Mayor and to the Policy Board. In addition, a "federal co-ordinator would be assigned to each participating city to assist local officials in bringing together all the relevant federal resources."¹⁰ To assist the Director, a Deputy Director is appointed to oversee the program.¹¹ Together, they are accountable for directing and coordinating all aspects of the Model Cities program.

Consisting of twenty-one members, the Policy Board creates the policy to be followed for each individual city within given guidelines and sees that it is carried out in a justifiable and equitable manner. In the case of Springfield, Massachusetts, which is not atypical, fifteen members of the Board are members of the Model Cities area and are elected, one from each precinct within the area, three are from public agencies and the last three are from private agencies. Assisting the Policy Board is the Technical Advisory Board composed of several public and private

¹⁰ "Crisis in the Cities: LBJ's Plan of Action," U. S. News and World Report, February 7, 1966, p. 57.

¹¹ Planning Report and Grant Application for the Model Cities Program, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1970, p. 265. This document is located in the files of Model Cities, Springfield.

agencies cooperating with the project. Housing, Health and economic areas are usually represented on this committee.¹²

While the administrative structure and the underlying philosophy has been discussed, the question of exactly what is the Model Cities program has not been answered. From the available data, it seems that Model Cities is a re-run of an old American idea, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. The only difference now is that the governments have entered into the process.

Two areas of particular importance that cannot be overlooked are health and education. By bolstering these two realms, it will not be necessary to resort to welfare. To break the poverty-breeding cycle, the role of education was given a major position in the Model Cities program. Taking the example of Springfield, three areas were selected to help the target area residents help themselves: day-care centers, suspendee program for potential drop-outs, and a supervised study area for high school youth. A day-care center had to be established to provide a place for mothers of small children to place them in order to find employment. Within three weeks after the center was opened, daily attendance has been 105, more than capacity. The waiting list is

¹²Planning Report, p. 265.

now over 300 applications each month.¹³ The only other resort was to welfare, the philosophical antithesis of the program.

A suspensee program coupled with a study center was developed in conjunction with the Springfield School Department to reinforce positive classroom attitudes and inquiries, and it has cut the number of dropouts in the target area in half. According to the Planning Report, "this project is designed to provide a conductive setting for study and to provide tutorial service in Math and English for 245 MCA [Model Cities Area] residents. This number represents the minimum of students who are doing poorly in school — 145 suspensees and 100 potential dropouts."¹⁴ It was found that educational facilities were lacking in equipment, and that all elementary schools in the target areas were without gymnasiums, cafeterias and auditoriums, which further complicated the problem.

In order to combat the higher mortality rate among lower income families, improved health services were provided, in some cases for the very first time. The primary emphasis has been on pre-natal and infant care, areas traditionally neglected in poverty areas.

¹³Interview with Anna Hooker, Model Cities office, Springfield, February 22, 1972.

¹⁴Planning Report, pp. 346-366.

The most important priorities for the pre-natal/infant care center are to provide a "facility for expectant mothers with children less than two years of age," "to assist in coordinating existing maternity facilities in an attempt to increase the use of such services in the first trimester of pregnancy, and to begin a system where there is some continuity of service for each mother," and finally, "to provide continuing instruction for mothers in infant care. . . ." ¹⁵ Generally, then, the purpose of the health clinic is to provide care and training for the mother and child, both before and after delivery. In addition, a second phase of the health service included family planning and preventive medicine. ¹⁶

In order to have the people of the Model Cities area respond to the program to help themselves, equality in execution and the wishes of the target area residents have been considered. Membership on the Policy Board at an early date was assured when the program was promulgated. It was decided that "residents must have direct access to the decision making process and given maximum opportunity for jobs in projects of the target area." ¹⁷ Besides giving

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 417.

¹⁶ Interview with Anna Hooker, February 22, 1972.

¹⁷ Model Cities Program: Questions and Answers, p. 3.

residents a voice in the project, it was further decided that "all employees of Model Cities are employed without regard for race, color, creed, religion, sex, or national origin."¹⁸ Without these assurances, no local confidence in the programs could be developed.

One final question must still be answered: how does a city become a Model City. While there may be diverse methods of making a decision, five basic criteria are considered. Selection is performed by the departments which administer the entire program. Selection as a Model City is based on thoroughness of the self-analysis of the applying cities, seriousness of the need, commitment of the local government to the program, problems of geography and population, and the involvement of Model neighborhood residents.¹⁹ Grants of money for putting the program into operation provide much of the disturbance with the project. "So far, grants have ranged from New York City's \$65 million and Chicago's \$38 million to \$938,000 for Juneau, Alaska and \$750,000 for Pikeville, Kentucky."²⁰ The average amount given to each city is less than the \$45 million damage done

¹⁸ Department of Housing and Urban Development, Model Cities Management Series, (Washington, D.C., 1971), V, section 35.11.02.

¹⁹ The Model Cities Program, p. 12.

²⁰ "Heavy Fighting Shakes Model Cities," U. S. News and World Report, August 1, 1970, p. 65.

in the Newark riots of 1967.²¹

The size of the city has relatively little bearing on the eligibility for funds. While New York City has a population in excess of 8,000,000, Alma, Georgia with 4,000 residents also receives funds. Twenty cities in the Model Cities program have populations less than 25,000.²² In Springfield, with a population of 168,000, the Model Cities project "will represent over two (2) million dollars in programs for the 18,000 people in the Model Neighborhood. It will represent a degree of coordination and cooperation of agencies and city departments that until the present has never been realized."²³

In recapitulation, the Model Cities program is not an overnight panacea for the problems of the city, nor is it the perfection of interagency cooperation.²⁴ The program has been judged a failure by some and a success by others. Its supporters claim that the program is "the most promising tool for saving blighted areas."²⁵ On the other hand, those who proclaim it to be a failure attempt to make it do more than it was originally intended to do.

²¹National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report.

²²Model Cities Program, p. 16.

²³Planning Report, p. 9.

²⁴Model Cities Program, p. 17.

²⁵"Model Lethargy," Newsweek, October 13, 1969, p. 70.