The Calvert County Comprehensive Plan

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Upper Merion Township Comprehensive Plan Update


Working Paper on the Comprehensive Plan


On June 28, 1983, the board of county commissioners for Calvert County, Maryland, adopted a comprehensive county plan recommended by the county planning commission. It had been the subject of four public hearings and numerous public meetings and discussion since 1981. It culminated an effort that Gregory Longhine called "professional and innovative" in the PAS Memo on "new wave plans" (APA, March 1984, 84-3) and received an award at the 1985 APA conference in Montreal.

The Calvert County Comprehensive Plan provides a policy direction for coordinating the activities of a half-dozen major divisions of county government: planning and zoning, administration and finance, public safety, community resource, public facilities and services, and public education. The plan is the guiding statement for Calvert County, which had a population of 35,000 in 1980 and governmental expenditures of $22 million in fiscal 1981. The format of the plan facilitates its application: a brief statement of objectives precedes each division and subsection, followed by recommendations that link the plan to action. The responsibilities for continuously monitoring and evaluating the plan—specified in detail—are shared by department heads, the administrative director, and various boards, commissions, committees, and councils formed to oversee its implementation. The county commissioners periodically report to the public on the agencies' findings and on proposed changes or revisions to the plan. The planning commission directs attention toward recommendations that have not been addressed and evaluates the plan's long-term validity.

In correspondence with this reviewer Frank A. Jaklitsch, director of the Calvert County Department of Planning and Zoning, says the importance of this policy approach is the opportunity it provides for generating public interest in the planning process. "Without that interest," he says, "it is difficult to introduce effective policies. People are willing to discuss ideas. They are less interested in grappling with the technical details of solving localized land use problems unless they are personally and immediately impacted, in which case they are willing to discuss nothing else."

The Calvert County Comprehensive Plan addresses the issues that are important to that community. It captures the interest, understanding, and support of those whose decisions are important to its reference and use. The plan deserves special credit for keying its recommendation to the administrative structure of the local government.

Fortunately, this focus on planning and management is no longer novel or unique. The Montgomery County (Pennsylvania) Planning Commission is revising the Upper Merion Township Comprehensive Plan. The Update, focusing on transportation, seeks to provide a plan that will overcome accumulated deficiencies in the transportation network and anticipate expected demands. This plan also emphasizes an aggressive implementation strategy. It goes beyond relying on customary public sources and tests private-sector financing of public needs. The township manager and township supervisors are coordinating the update in order to assure a familiarity with the resulting product and its use in decisions concerning township affairs.

In a similar vein, the Centre Regional Council of Governments (State College, Pennsylvania), through its regional planning commission, has launched a comprehensive program to revise its comprehensive plan. This endeavor calls for the integral involvement of the COG manager and governing body in developing a five-year operational program that addresses "programs, projects and regulation; project plans and studies; [and] a capital improvements program," with provisions for annual evaluation.

What we are seeing in the foregoing activities is planning at its best; planning as good as the governmental environment in which it functions. In each instance, a dynamic expression of the planning process is underscoring the way in which a comprehensive plan is used. These are plans that will not gather dust on bookshelves!

Irving Hand

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Ethics in Planning


Ethics in Planning heightens our awareness of the ethical presuppositions that tacitly guide our every act. It repeatedly peels
off the masks of self-deception associated with the "flight from thinking" of which Heidegger complained.

With the growing specialization of work and the seductive lure of "powerful" techniques that appear to translate the intractable into the calculable, practitioners increasingly risk divorcing themselves from the larger concerns of planning. Questions of ethics, in particular, have suffered from the urge to render complex dilemmas into black and white solutions. Such one-dimensional approaches "would restrict discussion of professional ethics to the propriety of everyday social and professional relationships," writes Martin Wachs in his introduction. "It would ignore the broader ethical content of planning practice, methods and policies. While narrow definitions of ethical behavior can easily preoccupy public officials and professional associations, they divert attention from more profound moral issues."

The book's introduction provides a theme for examining ethics in planning: the 17 readings illuminate that theme, each casting light from a different angle. Wachs, for example, diffuses the myth of objectivity in forecasting by highlighting the politically self-serving nature of assumptions which must be subjectively chosen, but without which forecasting would be impossible. In contrast, the articles by Alasdair MacIntyre and Steven Kelman confirm Joseph Weizenbaum's fear that under instrumental reason "all conflicting interests are replaced by the interests of technique alone." Kelman writes, "Like the Molière character who spoke prose without knowing it, economists advocating the use of cost-benefit analysis for public decisions are philosophers without knowing it." If they did know it, they might be less ready to adopt methodologies that uncritically impose a system of utilitarian ethics in which judgment is surrendered to calculation.

By bringing to the surface the latent imprint of utilitarianism—and doing so with a clarity uncommon in the philosophical literature—both MacIntyre and Kelman provide for a higher level of policy criticism. After reading them, one can no longer comfortably absorb Mark Moore's "Realms of Obligation and Virtue" without pausing for thought. "There seems to me no choice but to face up to the fact of uncertainty, explicitly assess the relative probabilities of different results in all areas of concern, and decide on the basis of some expected result appropriately weighted," Moore says. Wachs would contend that such probability assessments ultimately boil down to subjective political choice; MacIntyre's and Kelman's arguments indicate that such reductionism conceals significant ethical issues in a calculus of illusory objectivity. As MacIntyre describes in a discussion of four alternative methods for computing the value of a human life, it is "clear that all the mathematical sophistication and rigor that may go into the modes of computation may be undermined by the arbitrariness—relative to the mathematics—of the choice to adopt one principle for quantifying rather than another."

Moore accommodates rather than transcends those limitations of cost-benefit analysis that he does recognize when he argues for the introduction of standards of justice. In stating that individuals should understand that their "rights" may be abridged when compelling reasons for doing so exist, and when the rights have been protected by procedures that force the state to establish compelling reasons, and, sometimes [my emphasis], arrange suitable compensation," he merely affirms that these "rights" are no rights at all. "The mere possibility of very bad effects would not be an absolute bar to a policy," Moore writes. "It would all depend on the probability of the very bad effect, and the other offsetting (or not quite offsetting) advantages of the policy." But anyone who has read MacIntyre will wonder whether a "very bad effect" such as an increased mortality rate either can or should be traded off against purported "offsetting" advantages.

Kant tells us to "never treat humanity in yourself or another as a means only, but as an end withal." To a Kantian it is immoral to even attempt to put a cash value on human life. A view of justice that establishes fundamental rights that may not be traded off makes for interesting discussion when extended to the rights of nature in sections on ecology and the environment. That, in turn, provides a basis for criticism of some of the concepts included in the chapters on corruption and whistleblowing. Is it in order for an organization to compute an "optimal" level of corruption? Edward Banfield says one might expect that managements determine "the level at which the marginal cost of anti-corruption measures equals the gains from them." Although he does not address the view that corruption is indefensible and not to be tolerated at any cost, the provocative writings of other authors in Ethics in Planning bring the reader to consider the deeper aspects of this problem.

Frank Fischer presents a compelling case for legal argumentation, rather than calculation. His account is refreshing because he recognizes that "organizational policy arguments—unlike scientific arguments based on closed and generalizable models—must be open and contextual." Fischer's emphasis on the interpretive dimensions of policy evaluation would subject to criticism the assumptions of a given value-system. "The vindication of a political choice between reading scores and socially relevant experiences," for example, "requires the evaluator to step outside of the value system from which these processes are drawn and to examine their implications for the larger social system as a whole."

Charles Anderson's discussion, "The Place of Principles in Policy Analysis," is also provocative but is ultimately disappointing. Although, like Fischer, he recognizes that "we face a genuine dilemma of decision only when we are aware that public purposes can be perceived and appraised in more than one way," he insists on avoiding "questions like What is justice?" preferring instead "to stay safely within the positivist and pragmatic tradition." This seems inherently contradictory.

The creative dissonance generated by overlaying variations in different keys drives the reader's critical imagination. Wachs's collection points to a "return to thinking." But one is left with a disquieting thought: Here is an ideal book for a course in planning ethics or for practitioners who want to learn about ethics, but its message is that every avenue of planning must incorporate ethical appraisal, that ethics is not something that is separate—or to be studied separately from—other aspects of planning. The power of this collection to counter unreflective trends in today's planning and planning education cannot be overstated.

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