

politan development to offer comparable or greater economies of scale than area-wide approaches, and to be more feasible politically.

Another economic factor favoring comprehensive development is the protection that it offers against unwise local investments. Small facilities, particularly for sewage disposal and treatment, are excessively expensive to operate, obsolesce rapidly, and rarely provide the long-range solution that a comprehensive program can insure. Suburbs jealous of their autonomy often have preferred uneconomic individual community facilities to membership in a larger system. However, postwar experience in the Seattle and Denver metropolitan areas illustrates that in many instances community plants will eventually be abandoned. For the suburbanite who began with an individual treatment system, this poses the possibility of a triple investment: First, a septic tank; second, a community treatment facility; and, third, a regional sewage disposal and treatment system. James R. Ellis, a key figure in the creation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, has underscored the foolhardiness of unwise small community sewage facilities:

If we are ever to have utility services at reasonable cost we must be prepared to make the long-term investment required and to stop pouring dollars down the rat-hole of inadequate facilities, many of which will be obsolete before they are paid for. The economic waste in stubbornly duplicating permanent sewage disposal and water supply facilities cannot be justified under any rational theory of local autonomy.¹⁵

In most metropolitan areas, however, political realities rather than engineering, planning, and public administration considerations are the crucial factors affecting the possibility of altering the structural base for planning, allocating, and applying public resources. The chances of achieving structural changes in a particular metropolitan area depend primarily on attitudes, timing, and the pattern of interest groups as they conflict, compete, and cooperate.

Crises in health, service, or financing, actual or impending, generally are required to secure sufficient consensus to launch a metropolitan water-sewage program. Hostility to Los Angeles' annexation policies, the dire need of southern California for additional water, and a desire to enhance the area's bargaining position at the State and Federal levels led to the creation of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Fragmentation of effort and inadequate financial resources led to the creation of the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District in 1954. Severe water pollution and an increase in the rate of infectious hepatitis spurred the creation of a tricounty sanitary agency in the Portland, Oreg., area. The grave danger of sewage effluents threatening Lake Washington, a prime recreational area, resulted in the creation of a metropolitan agency in Seattle with responsibilities limited to the development of a regional waste disposal system.

SINGLE PURPOSE VERSUS MULTIPURPOSE AGENCIES

The dominant approach to date in providing water and sewage service on a regional basis is the single-purpose agency with no other service responsibilities, such as the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority, the Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago, and the Metro-

¹⁵ James R. Ellis, "Government for Growth, the Seattle Story," address before the Section of Municipal Law of the American Bar Association, Aug. 27, 1958.