

and problems, such as population growth, economic development, housing, recreation, water supply and sewage disposal, community facilities, and local zoning and subdivision regulations.

Metropolitan planning agencies have made important contributions to urban development by projecting future growth and advising on needed services and other governmental activity. Their research has served as useful background for private as well as public investments. The main problem in metropolitan planning, however, is how to translate plans into action. Only a handful of metropolitan planning agencies have operating responsibilities that enable them to put a few elements of their plans into practice. Most are purely advisory and must rely on their powers of persuasion in dealing with local governments and public authorities. Their relationships with governments and public agencies operating in the metropolitan area are therefore critical.

Most metropolitan planning agencies provide information and technical advice to local governments; this function carries with it limited opportunities to influence local decisions. Only about a quarter of them have mandatory referral power to review local plans and regulations; still fewer have mandatory referral power for local capital improvement programs. About half review or comment on some local, State, or federally supported projects.⁴³

Metropolitan planning agencies typically have very limited legal authority. Nevertheless, they have tried to marshal public support by educational and public relations activities, and many have taken the initiative in studying and discussing issues of regional significance. In the absence of stronger metropolitan institutions or leadership, these agencies can play an important role, similar to that of voluntary metropolitan councils, in airing public issues and promoting area-wide approaches to problems.

As an approach toward strengthening government in urban areas, metropolitan planning is promising, but its technical accomplishments have far exceeded its influence on government decisions. A recent evaluation of metropolitan planning by the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University concluded that the potential contribution of such planning to urban development is considerable, and warrants granting additional responsibility and more generous support to metropolitan planning agencies.⁴⁴ The Commission has reached similar conclusions and has proposed several ways of integrating metropolitan planning more effectively with government decision-making. One is to make local zoning, building regulations, highway plans, and proposals for major physical facilities subject to metropolitan planning review. Another Commission recommendation, to be discussed more fully in chapter VII, is to link metropolitan planning more closely to the coordination of Federal-aid programs in metropolitan areas.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed a number of ways in which local governments can be strengthened to cope with urban functions. These ap-

⁴³ Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-123.