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GROWTH AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

In 1965, when Edison's population was estimated to be 60,489, it was found that the population was growing at the rate of 3,000 persons a year - 75% of this growth was the result of immigration. It was expected that the population would reach 85,000 by 1975. This, of course, did not reckon with the sharp decline in housing starts at the end of the sixties and In 1970.

In 1960, Edison was a lower-middle class town. Census statistics show that 47% of the labor force were in blue-collar occupations, with 46% in white-collar jobs and 7% unskilled workers. Thirteen percent of the workers were in professional and technical occupations, as compared with Metuchen's 35%. However, median school years completed was 11.5, somewhat higher than the state and county level, and median family income was \$7,260, higher than that of the county as a whole.

Although the final 1970 census figures are not available at this time, it appears that the 22,000 people who have moved into Edison in the last decade are younger, better educated, with more money. Housing prices have risen, as in the region as a whole. A four-bedroom home, for example, which sold for \$29,000 in 1964, was sold in 1970 for \$40,000. New three and four-bedroom colonials and splits are in the \$45,000 - \$55,000 range, with other developments ranging into the high \$60's.

The strains put on the town by the rapid rise in population are obvious. The elementary school population increased 93.6% from 1956 to 1966, developing a need for thirteen new classrooms a year. Junior and senior high school enrollments trebled,

increasing over two hundred percent, although part of this increase was due to the opening of the first high school in the community.

A survey of the community facilities in 1968 detailed many of the problems facing such a rapidly growing community. According to the planners, adequate space for recreation was not set aside because a great deal of growth took place before the need was fully appreciated. This should not be a problem, however, in a town with so much open land.

Library services were found to be poor, although efforts had been made to improve the service. Prior to 1965, the only library in Edison was located in a storefront containing some 15,000 volumes. A new library was built in 1965, and branches have been established. Presumably, the pressing need for additional volumes has been alleviated to some extent in the interim.

A new administrative center is also badly needed, since the present Township building was found to be inadequate more than a decade ago.

Fire protection was found to be adequate in 1968, although several new stations were recommended, including one to protect the growing industrial Raritan Arsenal area. Additional police protection was also contemplated because of the increased industrial expansion.

Perhaps the most important service needs of the community in terms of development centered on sewers and other utilities. If further development was to take place, these lines would have to be extended to the vacant land in North Edison and in the

Raritan Arsenal site. The Township of Edison has a municipally ~~operated~~ owned sewerage agency which operates through the Department of Public Works and serves approximately 86 per cent of the total area - some 81% of the total population. The entire township is part of the Middlesex County Sewerage Authority District.

In 1968, the planning consultants suggested that the full impact of the location of Edison within the regional transportation setting would be only begin to be felt during this decade. Many of New Jersey's highways which are already carrying the world's heaviest traffic load pass in or near this part of the county - the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, I-287, Routes 1 and 9 to name a few. In addition, the development of the Menlo Park Shopping Center, the Raritan Arsenal, Camp Kilmer, and the North Edison area will generate a great deal of local traffic.

According to the 1960 census, fewer than twenty percent of Edison residents worked within the town. Almost one-third worked outside the county. These proportions are certain to have changed during the last decade with the tremendous growth of employment in the community.

A study of 1967 job levels done by the Middlesex County Planning Board described the 25,4-25 jobs in Edison. Only New Brunswick with 30,380 topped this figure. The jobs were divided as follows:

Manufacturing - 13,039

Wholesale - 564-

TCU & Construction - 2,220

Services - M-,077

Retail - 2,826

Government - 2,616

1980 estimates predicted almost 40,000 jobs in Edison, putting it about the same level as New Brunswick. LThe percentage of manufacturing jobs will decline, while the biggest growth will be in wholesaling, retailing, and services. In the year 2000, Edison will have some &3,900 jobs, one-third of which will be manufacturing.

Edison - Planning and Zoning

Although the Township of Edison Planning Board was established in 1947, its first Master Plan was not adopted until 1957. The town was growing so quickly, however, that it became necessary for a new Master Plan in 1962 and a revision in 1968. Unfortunately, Edison is a difficult community to plan. Entire areas are cut off by the various railroads, highways, and utility rights-of-way and, of course, Metuchen is carved out of its center. The complicated land use pattern, with a semi-circle of industry separates the residential communities into numerous sub-communities. The planners cite problems of mixed non-conforming uses, confusing street patterns, and pockets of lax home maintenance.

Zoning issues have riled up the citizens on occasion, as in all suburban towns. In October, 1963 the News Tribune noted that four months after the Supreme Court ruling that zoning applications must be voted by public, Edison was still meeting and voting in private. This practise was finally discontinued in 1964.

Proposed garden apartment development came under attack in 1964, when the prospect of a \$20 million development north of the Metuchen line inflamed home-owners all along that end of the town. Nearly 2,000 units of apartment construction were either approved or under study in nine months. "I don't know why they call it a Zoning Board," one resident was quoted as saying, "its just an approving board."

According to newspapers reports, most of the area residents were young, well-educated, with children, living in homes ranging between \$20 - 34,000. They expressed fears of school

crowding, traffic congestion, and devaluation of property values as the outcome of what they termed indiscriminate building.

The incident precipitating citizen action came as a result of illegal changes made in the Township Zoning Map. Apparently, the Township engineer had made what he called "minor changes" in the map without an amendment to the zoning ordinance. One of these changes caused sixteen acres to be transferred from a single-family zone to an apartment zone. Relying on the map, the Meridian Development Company paid double the money for a thirty-seven acre tract including the illegal zoned land. Plans called for 658 apartment units - 322 one-bedroom, 168 two-bedroom, and 168 efficiencies.

Three citizens groups formed to oppose the development. Despite strong protests, the Board of Adjustment advised the Meridian to submit an amended application for a special exception. In February, 1965, some one hundred residents picketed Town Hall and jammed the Council Chambers - the first action of its kind in Edison history. The Planning Board, however, recommended approval of the application and referred it to the Board.

The mayor, a Democrat, went on record in favor of the apartments and charged that the demonstration had political overtones. A series of verbal insults followed, with people of both parties affirming their sincerity and commitment. The application was approved the following day.

The civic groups then started a superior court action. The eighty-three plaintiffs lived within one and half miles of the site. At the same time, a campaign was launched to force a referendum on garden apartment zoning, seeking to make apartments in residential B and BB zones subject to a variance instead of a special exception use permit, placing the burden on the developer to show why the project should be permitted, rather than on the

residents to prove it should not.

A four-week drive to get 8,000 signatures, produced over 1,000 in the first week. Within five weeks, some 7,500 signatures were obtained. In June, 1965, the first modern day initiative petition in the Raritan Bay area passed its first hurdle, leaving the Township sixty days to adopt it or place it before the voters. In the November 1965 general election, the referendum passed.

Meridian then sued Edison and the civic organizations, challenging the constitutionality of the ordinance, and in effect, testing the Faulkner Act. In June, 1966, Superior Court Judge David Furnam found that the referendum and new ordinance were valid under the first article of the New Jersey State Constitution, stating that all political powers are inherent in the people.

The initiative and referendum procedure is one of the cornerstones of the fundamental Faulkner Act purpose to encourage citizen interest and participation in municipal affairs. The court holds that the legislature superceded the statutory procedure for the amendment of zoning laws by-passing the Faulkner Act, under which the Edison form of Government is established. Meridian subsequently put up single-family homes on the property. It should be noted that by 1968, unanticipated Township growth was cited as a prime factor in the Planning Board's decision to rezone for garden apartments rather than have them built to variance.