

LAND USE PLANNING ISSUES

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The Extension Service National Land Use Task Force has been delegated the responsibility of projecting an understanding of the opportunities and the processes involved in land resource management. Areas that have been identified for attention include: (1) issues and concerns, (2) land use policy choices and alternatives, (3) the decision maker, and (4) the citizen's role in land use planning.

The problem in the planning and allocation of land resources is that different people or groups want different things from these resources. What constitutes quality of life and what is possible under certain of these resource constraints are therefore key issues.

Deciding on the proper use of land depends on the careful assessment of human needs and desires. Land has been equated with power, with the establishment of personal identity, and with money, as a commodity in the marketplace. It has been seen as a natural resource, as a source of public wealth, and as space for expansion.

Tolerance for different points of view, coupled with apparently boundless wealth, has led Americans to exploit natural resources in the name of individual freedom. Many current problems stem directly or indirectly from this continued exploitation of a limited resource—land price speculation, urban sprawl, diminishing farm lands, and lack of access to public space. The prevalence of the automobile has also intensified some land use problems.

Land use affects others besides the owners and users. The next step is to develop policies, programs, and legislation for our land resources that avoid or anticipate problems before they arise.

Effective evaluation calls for recognition of past circumstances which have led to present conditions; awareness of facts needed to assess the current state of affairs; and, finally, use of these two kinds of information to make educated guesses about the future. Within such a framework, the following discussion examines six central issues affecting land use:

1. The legal and economic implications of land as property.

2. The implications of rural-urban relations.
3. The effect of technology on land use.
4. The requirement of land for food and fiber (consumer demands).
5. Intergovernmental relations affecting policy decisions.
6. National development and population distribution.

THE LEGAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF LAND AS PROPERTY

Property consists of the rights society gives an individual with respect to an object or physical entity. The rules for controlling what society gives are defined by law. In this country territorial rights and property ownership have dominated decisions affecting land use. Many questions concerning land resources have been settled by viewing land as property.

As a consequence, land owners have emphasized the economic aspects of property, viewing it primarily as a commodity or input into the production process. Ownership of commodities has implied absolute rights concerning their use or disposition. Thus individuals tend to regard land use as a matter of personal choice.

In early America, concepts of property rights assured a land owner almost unrestricted use of his land regardless of the effects on owners of adjacent property. Land use effects across property lines led to nuisance laws permitting other land owners (or governmental units) to restrict an individual's use of his property if such use were odorous, unsightly, noisy, hazardous, unhealthful, or harmful to the general welfare.

At present, a concern for the public interest clearly allows the restriction or regulation of land use, with the extent and form remaining in question. Restrictions on use, for example, may reduce the economic worth of land without any compensation to the owner. Some agree such restrictions amount to a taking only if the economic value of the land to the individual is concerned and not its value to the community. Has the public the right to restrict use to the point that the property has no economic value to the owner, if it thereby protects a public right? Conversely, public investments may increase the value of an individual's property at the taxpayer's expense. Should the owner alone gain from the increased value, or should a portion of such value be returned to the public that created it?

Only recently has the central concept of individual property

rights been challenged. Now major challenges which must be answered have arisen.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF RURAL-URBAN RELATIONS

Continuing population growth and concentration in urban areas have increased the demand for urban land—for homes, for industrial and executive parks, for shopping and service centers. All these uses currently require greater per unit land area than the more densely built central city of older urban communities. Since many communities were originally settled as trade centers amid prime farm land, the conversion to urban uses often results in loss of prime land from agricultural production. Much more land is removed from agricultural production than is needed for urban expansion. Much land removed from agriculture in anticipation of urban use is good quality land. A recent study in Springfield, Massachusetts, indicates that rural land is being urbanized at rates from five to ten times faster than population growth.

Contemporary highways call for greater areas, with freeways using large amounts of land in both urban and rural settings, to serve mainly urban-based traffic. Urban residents also look to the rural land for recreational opportunities and for second homes. These urban pressures frequently conflict with rural uses and desires of rural residents. An awareness of man's impact on the land resource must now be accompanied by alternatives to realize the whole potential of this resource. *High quality agricultural land should not be lost by default but by deliberate decision.*

Land use decisions should be based on both rural and urban needs. Whatever policies this generation adopts should take into account both present and future demands, as they can be identified, for both rural and urban land resources.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE LAND

Modern technology also has implications for land use. One aspect of technology has been the amount of solid waste generated each year. Much of this solid waste goes into open dumps and sanitary landfills (occupying an estimated half million acres) that are located in areas of active agricultural production. Continued solid waste disposal may require as much as 150,000 additional acres each year.

Modern techniques for raising livestock and poultry in concentrated operations raise the problem of handling animal wastes, and this problem in turn has a direct bearing on the location of these industries.

Flood control and drainage projects have mixed impacts on use of land. The construction of reservoirs reduces the land surface area. Such reservoirs may have either a beneficial or an adverse effect on fish, wildlife, recreation, and stream bank erosion.

Unlimited surface mining has disturbed about two million acres of land, resulting in pollution through acid mine drainage into streams and in scars on the land's surface. The current need for energy will probably result in further extensive surface mine operations to reach the nation's sizable coal and shale resources.

LAND FOR FOOD AND FIBER

Since World War II, the United States has been able to increase land productivity at a greater rate than its population growth through the application of pesticides and fertilizers and the development of improved varieties. However, studies of the long-range effects of pesticides and fertilizers have led to demands for restriction of their use. Should such restrictions result in decreased production, more land will be needed to produce the same amount of food.

So far, land for agricultural use has not been a major policy issue in this nation. Even now, the issue is not a shortage of land but rather effective use of land. Planning and control of land use can guide the spatial distribution of population and economic activities, public development investments, and the preservation of land for agricultural and timber production to meet both national and international needs.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Land policy has had a powerful effect on this nation's growth and development. From the beginning it has been the source of bitter conflicts, first between developed nations vying for rights to the new world, then between settlers and Indians, and finally among the colonists themselves. The nation developed various policies that promoted westward migration. Land grants were made to encourage railroads, telephone lines, roads, and canals. The Homestead Act helped settlers to push westward and develop new land. Preservation policy began in 1891 with the Forest Reserve Act. New laws created national parks and game refuges. The National Soil and Water movement resulted in further legislation concerning land as well as agricultural production.

Although land grants, the Homestead Act, and other governmental policy have led primarily to disposal of land in the public domain, the federal government has recently shown great concern

about future utilization of public as well as private land. This concern has been reflected in a variety of multi-county planning organizations, in national environmental legislation, and in special concerns with coastal zoning.

Over the past fifty years local governmental units have had almost total responsibility for actual control of land use. The 1924 Model Zoning Act and the 1928 Standard Enabling Planning Act still guide current land use control practices. Continued state reliance on the concept of these two model acts has kept planning and land use controls in the hands of local government.

However, the growing concern for long-range conservation of natural resources on the part of both federal and state government has interacted with the investment of public funds to create pressure for comprehensive intergovernmental land use planning. Presently a primary need is to develop a workable interaction between levels of government so that coordinated land use decisions are possible. Such interaction depends on defining which elements of land use are of national concern and which are the proper concern of state and local government. Federal grants to local entities for water and sewer facilities without proper attention to sound land use planning is one example of the need for better intergovernmental coordination.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Almost 30 percent of the nation's population lives in central cities and another 40 percent in suburbs, small urban places, and rural areas within standard metropolitan statistical areas. The remaining 30 percent live outside the metropolitan area. Although a greater proportion of the population lives in concentrated urban settlements, the latest census shows continued growth in more dispersed communities outside the urbanized areas.

The federal government, with the adoption of the Rural Development Act of 1972, has recognized, as part of its national development policy, that the nonmetropolitan portion of the nation must receive increased attention. Full and forceful application of the act would influence population distribution, with larger numbers remaining or being attracted to nonmetropolitan areas. Should this occur, additional pressures for land for urban uses would arise in the dispersed communities. A continuation of the trend would also reduce the population density in metropolitan areas.

No matter what progress is made in rural development, most of the population will still live in urban areas. Public investment and governmental policies can influence urban land use. Policies to

contain urban sprawl, to renew deteriorating areas, and to put vacant lands within urban perimeters into productive use are possible matters for governmental attention.

There is a need for relevant research and policy determinations. There is an urgent need for study of the economic and social considerations in land use planning.

We have all the land we need to produce the food products we will need as a nation. I have not heard a word about the cost as we use our better agricultural land for supposedly needed housing, transportation, and other purposes.

I have not heard about the costs associated with energy of moving our people from the outlying subdivisions to the central area of production, or the costs or policy decisions that must be faced if we are to have public participation in land use decisions.

Gene Wunderlich, in a paper entitled "Who Owns America's Land?" says:

Research on property is subject to the great dilemma of choosing between analyses that are specific enough to be empirically sound and analyses that are general enough to be of significance. Can there be criteria for the economic performance of the property system? Can the transaction costs of marketing rights be determined? How well does the property system assign costs and benefits of economic activity? Perhaps, too, the really important issues have little to do with economics.

Raleigh Barlowe in his publication, *Land Resource Economics*, commented:

With increased population pressure and the increased material requirements of modern life, the area needs of almost every type of land use are bound to increase. The problems of meeting these additional land requirements would be simplified if each use could expand without infringing upon lands needed for other purposes.

This is what it is all about. Land use planning is not a simplistic endeavor; it is time consuming and it is a sophisticated process. It is a controversial subject. It deals with emotion and logic, with idealism and political reality, with preservation and market-oriented traditionalism. Above all, it deals with people and their reliance on the nonrenewable resource—land.