County Planning in Indiana

KENNETH L. SCHELLIE, PRESIDENT
Metropolitan Planners, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Your invitation to have me appear on your program to discuss county planning is certainly appreciated because it gives me an opportunity to report to you, as to county planning progress in the State of Indiana. It was just about ten years ago when I was Director of the Indiana Economic Council that I appeared at this Road School and discussed the status of county planning. It is interesting to note that in 1947 there were nine operating county plan commissions in the State of Indiana; now when we take a look at the picture we find that there are 34 such commissions, a few of them relatively inactive I suppose, but by far the majority being much concerned with the problems of development and growth throughout the rural territory or the unincorporated area in those counties. In addition to this number, I understand from the Indiana Economic Council that there are 11 more Indiana counties which are now giving serious consideration to the establishment of plan commissions so that in total we have almost one-half of Indiana's counties concerning themselves with this problem.

Population Growth

In view of this spectacular upsurge in interest, it may be appropriate to question the reasons which lie behind it. Perhaps an examination of a few figures will tell that story. Indiana's population in 1950 was 3,934,000. In 1956 it was estimated by the Indiana Economic Council, that the state population had grown to 4,422,000 people or 488,000 persons more than in 1950—a growth of about 11 per cent. Furthermore, current estimates of future growth place the figure for 1970 at 5,562,000 persons, 1,140,000 more people in the State of Indiana than we have today. This represents a growth for that period of 20.5 per cent. Now it is evident that when the population increases, provisions must be made for housing the increased numbers of persons, and carries with it requirements for uses in the way of new and larger shopping facilities and unquestionably industrial plant development to provide additional employment.
for these people. So looking back at what happened to the population growth from 1950 to 1956, which incidentally is greater than the total number of people estimated now living in the City of Indianapolis, it is evident that we have added to the urban areas of the State of Indiana a city exceeding in size the City of Indianapolis, but of course, distributed throughout the state in a great many places. I am sure many of you County Commissioners have felt that in dealing with the problems of urbanization occurring in your locality that all of these people must be trying to develop property and live in your counties.

More specifically this population growth has meant something like this: that 153,000 new dwelling units have been provided and since most of the new units built in Indiana during the past six years have been in the form of single-family homes, these units have been erected in new subdivisions established for that purpose. If all of these homes had been built on average size lots in compactly built-up areas they would have occupied some 60,000 acres of land. We all know that this has not been true because many of the subdivisions that we are acquainted with are not completely filled so that certainly at least an additional 30,000 acres or a total of 90,000 acres in all have been affected by this population upsurge in terms of providing new housing. To go back to our 60,000-acre development again, this would have meant the construction of over 1,000 miles of road to serve these houses and in terms of other public requirements some 5,100 classrooms or about 316 18-room school buildings would be needed to house these children.

If all of these homes in all of these developments, along with the accessory business and industrial development, which would take at least again as much space as required for housing, had been confined to the land within the corporate boundaries of the cities of this state, we would not be having the interest in county planning that exists today. But as you well know, and as we have found from our experience in making land use studies in many cities in this state, most of the municipal corporations are full in terms of having extremely limited area within which they can provide new developments for housing or business or industry. The result of this situation has created problems with which most of you are acquainted. The development of residential subdivisions, new business areas and industrial plants in the unincorporated territory presents serious problems with which the county is primarily concerned. This had led directly to the door of the County Commissioners who are increasingly finding the solution to meeting the
problems created by this condition through the activity of a Plan Commission and the preparation of plans and ordinances to give reasonable guidance and direction to the development of this urban type of use throughout the rural community.

This has certainly been true in the past and will become even more significant in the future. The problems to be met between now and 1970 in accommodating the population growth expected for that period will be roughly two and one-half times that which I have just recited for the last six years. We can expect to see 350,000 homes built on subdivisions occupying about 150,000 acres of land and served by 2,400 miles of road and 660 18-classroom school buildings will be needed to house the additional children.

So it is not hard to understand why more counties are looking to the planning device as a means of adequately meeting the problem of providing for the development of the kind of communities that people like to live in and establishing a firm tax base to support the facilities they need.

*Establishing County Planning Programs*

The procedure for establishing a county planning program is a comparatively simple one. The 1947 Planning Act provides that the County Commissioner can pass an ordinance establishing a County Plan Commission. The commission consists of nine members, four of whom are termed official members, that is, they are people who serve on the commission by virtue of the office they hold. These are the County Surveyor, County Agricultural Agent, County Superintendent of Schools, and a member of the Board of County Commissioners selected by that group. The remaining five members are citizen members appointed from the unincorporated territory of the county by the Board of County Commissioners, the only stipulations being that there must be at least one such member from each Commissioner district and not more than three of the citizen members can be members of the same political party. The commission then organizes itself and proceeds under the terms of the State Planning Act to study the problems of the counties, make plans and prepare ordinances for submission to the Board of County Commissioners. The Commission itself does not adopt for the county any such plans or ordinances but rather acts in the capacity of an advisor to the Board of County Commissioners making recommendations to the Board as to the adoption or rejection of matters relating to the County Planning Program.

The program to be undertaken by the County Plan Commission can include a great many elements related to problems of the county
but there are several that seem to be of primary concern to most commissions. These deal with the matters of land use, the provision of adequate roads and streets and the subdivision of land. It is easy to understand why these matters should be of principal interest since they establish the pattern of development of the unincorporated territory which may be good or bad, depending upon the character of requirements which the county may establish for such improvements.

**Land Use**

In the matter of land use, accurate determinations are made with respect to how lands throughout the unincorporated territory are being used at the present time, and based on such surveys recommendations are made with respect to future land use requirements. Such uses relate primarily to the urban type, that is, residential, commercial, or industrial and are not designed to interfere with or in any way restrict the use of land for agricultural purposes. The full intent of the county planning program as we see it is to anticipate the change-over in use from agricultural or farming to the urban type which spreads out from cities and towns, and when that transition takes place, to make certain that the requirements have been established which will permit the best possible and most economic use of the land to prevail.

Land use proposals, as to the use of land in the future, are then set up in the form of a Zone District Map and a Zoning Ordinance on which the County Plan Commission will hold public informational type meetings, and upon the conclusion of such consideration make a recommendation with respect to the District Map and the Zoning Ordinance to the Board of County Commissioners. In accordance with the procedure set up in the State Planning Act, the County Commissioners will then give consideration to the plan and ordinance and call a legally advertised public hearing for its consideration, at which time any and all persons having an interest in the matter may be heard with respect to the proposals. Upon the conclusion of such hearings, the Board of County Commissioners can then proceed to consider the plan and ordinance and give it its approval or rejection as it may see fit. Following its adoption the ordinance can be amended as changing conditions may require. Once the Zoning is established most counties proceed with the preparation of a plan for the extension, widening, and possible re-alignment of major streets and highways serving the unincorporated territory. This type of plan has a great usefulness to insure that as the lands are developed for urban-type uses,
there can be provided a simple network of roads that will afford the best and most convenient paths of movement for traffic which is generated as the result of such development. It should be noted here that in the development of such a plan it is quite important that the land use pattern for the territory be established first through zoning inasmuch as the requirements with respect to traffic movement as they relate to residential areas, for example, will differ substantially from those to be found in a commercial or industrial district. Therefore, it will be seen that a strong relationship exists between the various elements of the planning program. The major street and highway plan will take into consideration all such local needs as well as the requirements of inter-regional traffic and the relationship of the rural areas to the principal urban centers within the county. The plan will indicate the character of use for each of the several classes of highways which may be established and stipulate the projected right-of-way required for such routes when land adjoining them is developed for urban uses. Upon proper consideration of such plan, public hearings are held by the County Plan Commission and consultation is had with all agencies having interest in the highway system plan. Following such action, the Commission will submit the plan to the Board of County Commissioners, together with an ordinance providing for its adoption. If approved by the Board of County Commissioners it becomes incumbent upon all developers of land within the unincorporated area of the county to recognize the needs and requirements of the projected highway system in order that the right-of-way for such roads will not be encroached upon and that adequate space for such roads will be provided in, through and adjoining the lands which they may be interested in subdividing.

Residential Subdivisions

The next element of primary concern in the planning program is one in which the County Commissioners are usually most interested. It is in the matter of subdivision of land for residential use that most County Commissioners encounter the problems that can create a whole series of headaches. It is for that reason that most County Plan Commissions proceed to develop a Subdivision Control Ordinance that will endeavor to create some order out of the chaotic conditions that exist where development takes place without the benefit of such ordinance. The primary requirement of a Subdivision Control Ordinance is that no developer of land can record a plat of a subdivision until it bears the approval of the County Plan Commission.
The ordinance prescribes the standards by which the Commission is to be guided in granting its approval. Primary among these are standards of design with respect to the layout itself, that is, prescribing minimum lot sizes, areas and width, the general pattern of the street system, size of blocks, and a number of other specifications dealing with the engineering characteristics of the design. The second part of the ordinance deals with the standards of improvements which will be required on the part of the County before the proposed subdivision will receive the certifying signatures of the County Plan Commission. These standards are determined by the County as being those which they feel are reasonable and justifiable in view of past experience and probable future demands and relate to such matters as the installation of sanitary sewer systems, storm sewers, street surfaces, curb and gutter, sidewalks, street signs, street lighting and such other improvements as the County may feel justified in requiring on the part of the developer. The ordinance prescribes in some detail just what will be required of the developer in each case, and in following out the requirements of the State Planning Act, will specify that such improvements should either be in place at the time the approval is given by the Plan Commission or that a bond in sufficient amount to insure the completion is filed with the Board of County Commissioners. In this procedure there can be no debate as to responsibility with respect to the provisions of public improvements required to adequately serve the residential areas developing throughout so much of the unincorporated territory of the state today.

The method of procedure with respect to the adoption of a Subdivision Control Ordinance is similar to that previously referred to, that is, the Plan Commission studies the matter, recommends an ordinance which it feels is required to meet the particular circumstances of the area, holds a public hearing on its provisions, and following such hearing, recommends its passage to the Board of County Commissioners. Naturally, as in all such matters, the County Commissioners have the privilege of amending the Plan Commission recommendations and, following its adoption, the ordinance may be amended as the Plan Commission and Board of County Commissioners may deem necessary.

**School, Park and Recreation Sites**

A further point of consideration in the matter of county planning to meet the requirements of urban development in the vicinity of cities and towns deals with the proper location of sites for schools, parks, playgrounds and similar public purposes. We
strongly recommend that County Plan Commissions give consideration to the development of a school, park and recreation area site plan to designate the locations and sizes of properties which will be needed to most conveniently and economically serve the residential areas as they develop. This plan, prepared in close collaboration with the school and park authorities who may be concerned with the problems of the future should be adopted in accordance with the procedure outlined previously and made a part of the County Master Plan.

The importance of doing so is illustrated by the fact that many residential areas have grown up within the vicinity of our cities and towns leaving no space for the future provisions of schools, parks, and playgrounds, creating a continuously heavy burden of supplying public transportation to carry children, particularly to schools, when such facilities might just as well have been located within walking distance. When a plan of this type has been adopted it falls within the scope of the enforcement of the Subdivision Control Ordinance. Such ordinances usually contain a provision that when lands which are proposed for future school or park or public purpose, are included within a tract of land to be subdivided, the developer may be requested to either dedicate such land for the public use (which will often happen in the case of large scale developments), or to place them in a reserved category, that is, holding them off the market until the public authority charged with the responsibility for such properties can get themselves in a financial position to purchase them.

Another device which is coming into more or less common practice throughout some parts of the country today to acquire school and park recreation area sites at the proper location, is that of assessing the land developer a fee, based upon the number of lots in the proposed subdivision, which will help finance the acquisition of land for the public purposes. We know that this practice is generally used in some of the Western states today and while we do not have any experience with it here in Indiana, we recently prepared an ordinance for a city in Illinois which requires the payment of such a fee, the income from the fee being segregated in a special non-reverting Capital Improvements Fund to be used only for the acquisition of land for schools and parks. Whether or not this will work in Indiana we do not know at this time, but it may provide a solution to assist public authorities in acquiring the lands needed to provide public facilities to serve the new subdivisions.

Here again, it will be seen that there is a close relationship
working between all the elements of the planning program I have spoken of. First, the establishment of a land use pattern to determine what areas will be used for residential and business purposes, and those which will be most acceptable for development as industrial property; the development of a major street and highway system that will provide for future circulation requirements throughout the territory being developed; the Subdivision Control Ordinance which has a strong effect on establishing the major street highway system, securing the dedication or reservation of public lands, the enforcement of good design standards with respect to layout in accordance with modern principles, and the requirement of improvements necessary to make such areas livable and thereby eliminating many of the problems now confronting County Commissioners throughout Indiana today.