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EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

The Social Planning Council is a voluntary citizens' organization which enables lay citizen interest and activity in planning for and acting on social and health problems. It alerts the community to pressing social issues and assists in finding and implementing solutions. It determines current and emerging health and welfare needs and develops plans to meet them.

Councils throughout the country have changed dramatically during recent years. This change has been brought about by the demonstration of citizens' desire to respond actively to the massive social problems facing us today. In addition, the change has been provoked by the emergence of new local planning groups under federal, provincial and municipal government direction. As governments become more active in the planning field, it is evident that there is an increasing need for the incidence of a strong citizens-based planning organization which can also serve as the voice of informed judgement and constructive criticism. The Council is placing greater and greater emphasis on the consideration of broad community planning and the resolution of total community social problems. This involves both a short and long range attack on social problems and also a sustained effort to ensure a co-ordinated and effective pattern of voluntary and governmental activity and services in our community.

Four major areas can be described as current functions of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. These are inter-dependent but can be looked at separately.

1. Establishing relationships with the Consumer or Constituency.

It is increasingly evident that Councils must become involved in community development or social animation. Through this function Councils will not only help to build new decision-making structures but also will secure valid and relevant information.

For the last two years, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has retained an out reach worker (who is assigned to the Boyle Street area of the City) and whose work is primarily concerned with persons who are welfare recipients or have marginal incomes. In addition to performing a community development function, this worker provides the staff and Board of the Edmonton Social Planning Council with valuable information regarding her constituency. Through this, the Council has become increasingly aware that this one-third of our population is not included in discussion or decision about services that influence their lives. It is our intent to use community development or social animation techniques to help build new decision-making structures.

The Council has been increasingly involved with neighborhood development throughout the City of Edmonton. There appears to be a definite trend towards planning at the neighborhood level involving representative groups of citizens who, on their own, are organizing community services. These developments are happening in Oliver District, Argyle, Glengarry, Hardisty and others. Citizen groups are taking the initiative to approach municipal government bodies, e.g. School Boards and with assistance from the Social Planning Council, Parks & Recreation Department, etc. are implementing programs at neighborhood levels using their own resource.

The steady emergence of indigeneous or self-help groups is another aspect of this change in which the council has become more involved. These groups in many instances are homogeneous and centre around mutual difficulties or problems - e.g. Future Society for convicts and ex-convicts, City Centre Co-op Clubs for transient homeless men, H.O.W. for persons and families on welfare, W.H.O. Growing up together, Native Brotherhood Information Centre. Groups such as these possess the initiative and drive to help themselves and having had personal experience possess understanding for other persons similarly troubled. However they are aware of the need for consultation and information about resources and methods. E.S.P.C. provides assistance of this kind and in some cases extends this to temporary office space, clerical and "paper" help. Their efforts are perhaps short term solutions but the low cost of their services and their success in caparison to more institutionalize and professional agencies indicate that we can learn a great deal and that these groups may provide some real answers. In any case E.S.P.C. feel they warrant support and encouragement and should be carefully observed and evaluated. Through our constant contact with the constituency we are also able to provide for existing agencies and departments an evaluation of the effectiveness of the service.

Examples of Current programs or projects.

- Native Brotherhood Projects
- Growing up Together
- Future Society
- Imployment Project
- Newspaper
- Transient Men, Hostel
- H.O.W.
- W.H.O.
- Human Rights Association
- Housing - Charette
- Hardisty S.A. Centre

2. Coordination of Service

The function of coordination has always been associated with the Social Planning Council but allows for some misunderstanding as to how this is performed. Total service - no duplication is the ideal. Council attempts, by providing a means for collaboration between existing services, planning groups and citizens, to ensure that competition between such services for resources either financial or personnel and also competition for users of the services, is reduced to a minimum. Simultaneously, the Council attempts to insure that gaps in services are filled. This requires a close working relationship with private and public agencies and constant inter-agency communication and consultation.

Some current examples of this type of co-ordinated activity are:
Society for Retired and Semi-Retired
Downtown Teen Centre and Associated Programs
Emergency Shelter for Women.

3. Consultation and Co-operation with Other Planning and Service Systems.

The Social Planning Council maintains a close working relationship with other Councils in the Province and with the Canadian Welfare Council and the Preventive Social Service Department of the City, with the Human Resource Development Authority and other planning bodies throughout the City, Province and nation. It is essential that our organization maintain up-to-date contact throughout the country in order that our voice can be heard whether provincial or federal programs are being developed which may directly influence citizens of our community.

Some Current Examples are:

Funds and Councils of Canada
C.W.C.
Mayors Committee on H.R.D.
City Social Service Advisory Committee
Advisory Committee to Minister of Social Development
Citizens participation Committee for Dept. of
Social Development.
U.C.F.
Liesure Consultants.

DEVELOPING AND INFLUENCING SOCIAL POLICY: THE ROLE OF CHANGE AGENT

② As pressing social issues emerge in our community, it becomes ever more apparent that a means must exist whereby citizens can make their wishes known and can gather to resolve problems. The Edmonton Social Planning Council attempts to respond to the community and through constant review to identify those issues that the community should become actively involved with; to generate the community's interest and to provide a platform for discussion and action. This activity necessarily involves fact-finding and research, the compilation and presentation of briefs, the organization of public meetings, methods to resolve acute problems as well as providing a means of on-going study of emerging concerns.

Some current examples of this type of activity within our organization are:

Citizens for Better Housing

Community use of schools

Worth Commission on Education in Alberta

Brief to Senate Committee on Poverty & generating other
community submissions

Educational T.V. series toward improving Welfare
delivery system

R.F.P. on men's hostel & follow-up.

ORGANIZATION

Briefly, the organization structure of the Edmonton Social Planning Council is:

- The Edmonton Social Planning Council is a citizen's organization;
- The Council is not a federation of agencies or their representatives;
- Membership is made up of interested individuals;
- The Council is directed by a citizens' board elected annually;
- The Board appoints various standing committees for administration and ad hoc committees for projects, studies and special programs;
- The Board retains a small professional staff to work closely with citizen committees;
- The Board makes professional staff services available to agencies organizations and other planning bodies;

DIRECT SERVICES

In addition to the above planning functions, the Council operates two direct services:

The Welfare Information Service is a 24-hour telephone answering service to provide citizens of the community with immediate information and referral. The incidence of calls is studied from statistics to give direction to the Social Planning Council and other groups in regard to gaps in service or trends. During 1968, more than 23,000 calls were processed. The Service is operated in collaboration with the Provincial Department of Social Development to link up to the crisis service which operates after-hours from the Edmonton Police Department. Since lack of information and the ability to act upon information appear to be major problems particularly with disadvantaged persons, has reviewed the Information Service in order to develop methods of ensuring that information given is valid and that the requesting party is able to act upon it. We are also encouraging and assisting in development of satellite information services, e.g. Boyle Street Project and specialized information services, e.g. Senior Citizens. The Welfare Information Service publishes annually a Directory of Health, Welfare, Recreation and Education Services in the City of Edmonton which is in wide use.

The second direct service operated under the Edmonton Social Planning Council sponsorship is the Christmas Bureau which is simply a means for ensuring that people on marginal income receive special help at Christmastime and to offer

clubs and organizations a means of serving our community through donations and Christmas gifts.

IN CONCLUSION

It must be remembered that the Edmonton Social Planning Council is a planning organization geared to serve the total community; it has no legal authority - no power to compel. It functions through a cooperative process. Its influence depends upon community sanction. Its effectiveness depends on citizen participation, involvement of the community's decision maker's, involvement of the constituency and the competence of the professional staff. It represents neighborhood, as well as total community interest.

April 30, 1970

THE SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL - Information for Members of the Council

Some Developments from 1969 - 1970 Examination of Structure & Methods

COMMENT:

In May 1969 at the annual meeting, the Board was requested by a motion of the Membership to study the structure of the Council and make recommendations to the membership.

A series of noon lunches have been arranged prior to the annual meeting (Tuesday May 27) to acquaint members with the present state of the Council's work.

An external fact of the Planning Council is the restive burgeoning of "community" and the desire for citizen action on social and physical environment problems. The Council is part of and must work within this social fact.

Two philosophies of planning method seen required. Each method pre-supposes certain theories of social change and certain assumptions about the nature of man and the bureaucratic milieu in which he functions.

STANDARD METHOD:

Traditional social research techniques for information - data gathering - objectivity - hypothesis formation and theory verification.

EXTENDED METHOD:

To overcome distortion of data that arises in the traditional research forms new experimental field styles of data gathering have been tested (a) to obtain widest possible input (b) to avoid distortion (c) to provide information from alternative persons who normally do not have an opportunity.

SOME OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

Problems in a pluralistic society do not lend themselves to "absolutes" or consensus solutions. A consensus and controlling board style of coping is no longer as feasible if anything is to be done at all. All information and control cannot funnel through a single board or a single committee or a single planning Director. No staff, so small as ours can cope with everything that is demanded. Last fall our inventory of projects amounted to some 40 projects - most of them in a state of "lethargy" for want of organized attention.

Some readjustments to our working arrangements were tested: some successful; some not:

1. Diminishing the philosophy of "control" and consensus.

2. Dispersal of decision-making and program to the Executive committee, program committee, and outside groups.
3. Totally flexible membership in the program committee.
4. Open Board meetings - participation for anyone.
5. Relinquishing of reliance on written documents as the sole medium of information: greater use of direct contact with data or people who are the data.
6. Testing of counter-programs on very limited pilot basis operated by indigenous users where established institutions seemed incommunicative or unable to respond to requests by users or clients.
7. Testing of reallocation of staff resources from secondary research functions to direct community action contact.
8. Testing of program - project intake criteria - and budget allocation. Grids for project objectives and evaluation are being developed.
9. Methods for program and project-work-flow control are being developed - are needing much refinement - much is yet to be streamlined on our assessment of our total space, clerical, monetary, professional and layman resources.

SOME ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS NOTED:

- ¹1. Extraordinary transiency in the executive posts over the past 15 months.
2. Overloading of the program committee in 1969 to the point that the board tended to disengage itself from coping with ideas or issues.
3. Inadequate work flow controls and resource allocation policies.
4. Executive committee has been almost non--functional for some years - this has left a gap in staff-board relations and created a dichotomy between concerns of the board and activities of the staff, with weak coordination of the two, and weak follow through on board decisions.
5. Attendance at board meetings and committee meetings has been inconsistent because the standing committees of the Council have not been functioning well - the role of the board has been confused with matters of policy and administration on top of the basic questions of social change philosophy and planning methodology. This has certainly been a frustration to many board persons.

FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ACTION AND DECISION MAKING:

1. Adopt the statement of assumptions as a working philosophy of the council at this point in time.
2. Develop four consortiums as study and action facilitation groups
 - Environment - transit roads, omniplex, housing, land use, density, rent control, population movement - etc. schools.
 - Human Development - income maintenance, welfare, health education.
 - Justice - Equity - availability of justice, privilege - the profession of Law, the techniques of the Courts, police authority and youth, the penal system, rehabilitation, development.
 - Information - issues of movement, distortion of, gathering of, welfare information services, privatization of public information, accessibility of persons and materials - e.g. city planners and city plans - land ownerships, development plans and developers.

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Each Consortium is a group of four persons interested and informed in one general area: their function is to (a) keep abreast of issues and activities in that subject area, (b) to gather information - circulate it. (c) to keep in touch with groups in the city having similar concerns (d) to initiate or support community study and action groups.

Each Consortium should have \$1,000.00 of funds at its disposal to allow for rapid response to emerging requests from community groups --and also to give the committee a sense of freedom, trust and responsibility. This capacity for action without recourse to a long chain of approval is basic to developing committees with commitment and the potential to act on their best judgement. It is also a device for widening decision making and enlarging the scope of our Council's energy resources beyond the limits of the staff.

Each Consortium should be free to speak on issues in the community without long recourse through the board for approval. Each consortium is only one informed opinion amongst many in the community-- the idea of agreement, consensus and control, is a tradition of the vertical authority concept of organization and is incompatible if not unenforceable in to-day's electronic media age.

3. Redeployment of the budget in that funds be available for the support of explorative and developmental field trial projects. A motion of the board recommends a target of 10% of the gross budget be set up for such a fund. The finance committee is endeavouring to do so in the 1971 budget. For the 1970 operating year a sum of \$6500.00 has been so far made available on this basis.