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EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

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The following is presented by Deloris Russell, Roger Soderstrom and Peter
Kishroya to the Co-ordinating Committee for discussion purposes.

Both the self-image and the public-image of the Edmonton Social Planning Council is diffuse. On the one hand, this leads to hostility, lack of credibility, and confusion in our external relations; on the other hand, this leads to undirected reactiveness in our internal operations.

- We seem to have no ready answer when confronted with such questions as "what is social planning?" "what is the Social Planning Council?".
- We often do not get credit for the good things we have done, but conversely we are prone to use our indirect involvement with groups as a shield from criticism.
- We have at one extreme acted on a self-help ideology as a citizens resource centre but with no goals for society being articulated and therefore with no criteria for deciding whom we help help themselves and for how long.
- At the other extreme we have opted for fairly fundamental social change with regard to such measures as the guaranteed annual income but without having clarified our role (giving minimal resources) in reaching any one, let alone a number of these goals.
- As a result of lacking a definition of ourselves as a council, the Co-ordinating Committee has no basis upon which to make policy and the organization tends to become a do-your-own-thing for staff and to a much higher extent for more staff Co-ordinating Committee members.

These are some of our concerns which lead us to present this document. We suggest that, as a Council, we should define ourselves very clearly with regard to the following two questions:

What are our areas of substantive concern?

What is our method of operating?

When we have answered these questions, we should publish a very cheap and very lucid pamphlet describing ourselves, the services we offer, and the methods by which one can take advantage of our services. Perhaps we have not done this recently because of our diffusiveness (or at least a lack of precision) in defining ourselves with the result that our operations have seemed even more of a mystery.

Suggested Areas of Substantive Concern

Generally, the Edmonton Social Planning Council is concerned with "Social" matters, but since this term is very vague, we suggest that it be narrowed somewhat to represent four areas of concern, each defined in terms of our organizational value choices and goals for society:

- i) a decent standard of living for all
- ii) humane social controls
- iii) participatory democracy
- iv) humane urban environment.

By defining our areas of concern in terms of values and goals we focus more clearly on what we are about than we would be simply saying we are concerned with welfare, penology, civic government, urban design, etc..

It is suggested that more specific objectives within each of the four goal areas be left to the citizens commissions (as described below) to define.

Suggested Method of Operation

Over the years, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has taken on a number of roles, including public education, research, mobilizing, lobbying, co-ordination, consultation and direct servicing of individual through such operations as AID Service, Christmas Bureau, and through para-Edmonton Social Planning Council activities like the Women's Overnight Shelter, Housing Bureau, etc..

It is suggested that the Edmonton Social Planning Council simply does not have the resources to undertake these various roles and to be involved with the four substantive areas listed above. After considerable thought we have concluded that we think it is more appropriate to limit ourselves in terms of role than in terms of substantive area of concern.

Specifically, we would suggest that we limit ourselves to taking on a research role, using the following four tools designed to allow us to work in all four substantive areas effectively on a highly limited budget.

1. Citizens Commissions: We suggest that four citizens commissions be established, one for each goal area. These commissions will be ongoing, will comprise seven people each, some of whom ideally being Co-ordinating Committee members, and will have responsibility for preparing an annual social audit in their area. Initially these audits may be similar in forms to Ted's paper on "Alternatives to Poverty and Welfare in Alberta". (In fact the citizens commission on decent standard of living for all may well decide to use this document as the basis for their annual social audit.) The social audit will be released one per week every December.

The first audits will specify social objectives the citizens commission has chosen in their respective areas and will, with abundant facts, document how far short we are of these objectives. Subsequent audits will document how far we have come over the past year in reaching the objectives enumerated in the first audit and will, if necessary, modify the set of objectives according to changes in their thinking or in society's situation.

Each social audit will be published, widely distributed and sold on a break-even basis. A cheap but interesting standard format will be used.

One staff person would be attached to each commission and would spend 20% of his time working with and for that commission (Deloris, Humane Social Controls; Roger, Participatory Democracy; Peter, Humane Urban Environment; and Planner X, A Decent Standard of Living for All). In the likely event that United Community Fund does not give us funds for a fourth planner this year, we would rotate responsibility to the fourth commission on a year-by-year basis.

2. Citizens Task Forces: The citizens commission may be said to be the offensive wing of the Council in which we set out to raise issues and document cases without waiting to be instigated to do so by some event, crisis or request.

The task forces, on the other hand, will be both offensive (i.e. taken on our own initiative) and reactive. Task forces will be short-lived (i.e. one month), directed to a specific event, issue or request, and broadly representative of relevant concerns.

For example, Lloyd Egan has asked us to get involved in some way in looking at Northeast Edmonton row housing (which he regards to be unsafe in the case of a fire and psychologically depressing). It is proposed that when approached on this matter we should say "yes" we will set up a task force composed of some people living in the housing, some people who have built them, civil servants from the Local Board of Health and Building Inspection, and uninvolved architects or builders plus one member of the Edmonton Social Planning Council's Co-ordinating Committee. The committee would meet four times: week 1 - to discuss the situation and determine what information they need; week 2 - to discuss the information collected since the first meeting and to determine what more might be needed; week 3 - to conclude and to write a three-page well documented fact laden brief to whomever is in a position to act on the recommendations; week 4 - to check over the brief and plan for its release and delivery.

It is hoped that each task force would fit within the framework of one of the four citizens commissions (though probably we might have to have a residual miscellaneous category) such that the Co-ordinating Committee person working on the task force also sits on the relevant citizens commission so as to facilitate the work of both.

It is envisaged that up to a minimum three task forces per month--one per staff planner--could be established and completed (i.e. about 20 per year).

The task force briefs would be on a standard letterhead, very "schnazzy", but would not be published in any formal sense even though they might be widely distributed (obviously for free). Each staff person would spend 40% of his time on task forces - say one per month - as follows: contacting prospective members, convening meetings, gathering some of the relevant dates and drafting reports (if necessary). Every task force would be approved by the Co-ordinating Committee.

3. Research Consultation to Citizens Groups: From time to time groups seek help from the Council in getting information. Where this is just a matter of directing people to the relevant sources, the request might not warrant establishing a task force. However, staff time will be spent with the groups coming to the Council and it is an important role to be played. We would estimate that say 20% of the staff's time would be spent providing research consultation to citizens groups in a purely reactive fashion.

4. Separately Funded Research Projects: A fourth possible research tool of the Council would be in carrying out follow-up research work to the social audits or task force reports.

In all cases this research would not be carried out by the regular staff and would be specially funded either through LIP, OFY, or through research funding agencies such as MSI, National Health and Welfare, etc.. Presumably, the research would usually involve obtaining primary data.

We would envisage that about 5% of the staff's time would be spent in applying for such grants as well.

The remaining 15% of the staff's time would be spent in administration, public relations, and other on-going supportive kinds of activities.

Suggestions for First Task Forces

1. Humane Urban Environment:

- 1) row housing in Northeast Edmonton: its concentration and design in terms of fire safety and psychological effects.
- 2) capitalization of the ETS: the growth of the bus and trolley fleet relative to passenger usage demand and extensiveness of travel.
- 3) the Westgreen Shopping Centre: 106 Street complex, the effects on the immediate neighbourhoods, the safety factor in terms of the airport and the effect on the city-wide transportation system.

2. Humane Social Controls:

- 1) evaluation of services to transient women in Edmonton: a comparison with the services available to men.
- 2) analysis of effects of present liquor regulations: such matters as pubs encouraging people to drink and not move around, lack of windows, lack of neighbourhood pubs and oversize facilities (e.g. Southpark) etc.

3. Decent Standard of Living:

- 1) evaluation of Christmas Bureau as a service.
- 2) analysis of new provincial budget in welfare area.

4. Participatory Democracy: (includes individual determination of life-style and decentralization of government)

- 1) analysis of family planning services in Edmonton.
- 2) training of CD students -- effectiveness and co-ordination of programs.
- 3) analysis of LIP 73 in the Edmonton area: kinds of projects funded and value of these kinds of projects -- kinds of projects not funded (a lot of community groups).