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FROM CONFLICT TO CONSENSUS:
THE MAKING OF THE CITY OF ADELAIDE PLAN
by
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Mr. President, my Lord Mayor, visiting Mayors, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is our common interest in urban local government that brings us together at conferences like this. We come to try to learn something new, or be reminded of something old, which might be useful to us in our own work.

Case studies can be helpful in explaining how other people have tackled some specific problems that local government faced in a particular community at a particular time. I have been asked to help you in this way by giving you a brief summary of how some major conflicts were resolved and a community consensus created in the making of the City of Adelaide Plan for which I served the Adelaide City Council as Consultant Director, and in which the present Lord Mayor, Jim Bowen, played and continues to play an important role.

However, in briefly summarising several years of intense professional work by many people, and political debate involving a whole City community, I want you to try to distinguish between the details of the case which are unique to Adelaide and the broad principles and processes which I believe are more generally applicable and adaptable to other problems in other local government areas in the future.

These distinctions are vital, because the Pacific Asian region covers the world's widest range of different types of cities, with widely diverse problems, resources and challenges. Management and planning techniques which succeed in one city or community will be quite irrelevant to another.

Some people at this conference have responsibilities for large metropolitan governments; others for local urban, suburban and provincial authorities. Some face the problems of post-industrial cities in rich, over-governed societies which are now, in many cases, experiencing economic recession, falling real per capita incomes, and slow growing, or even declining populations. Others grapple with the challenges of newly developing urban government bodies in older cultures, with rapid city population growth, partial industrialisation, lack of essential services and extreme urban poverty.

The specific practical problems of local government differ between countries, states and provinces, and between neighbouring local areas. The cultural, political, legal and economic conditions under which we must tackle these problems, also differ widely.

Even under the bland and seemingly simple face of Australian life, there are significant differences in dominant social values and behaviour patterns in different States and in different local government areas.

Thus, planning and management techniques, to be truly successful, must be sensitively and carefully adapted for use in different communities.

However, cutting through all these differences between Seoul and Sydney, Malaysia, Manila and Melbourne, Tondo and Tea Tree Gully, is one universal fact of contemporary urban local government in all modern and modernising societies. That is the tendency for urban local governments to be increasingly involved in open and publicised conflicts between opposing ideas and demands, policies and plans, to such an extent that effective decision making and action become difficult or even impossible. We are more than ever subject to conflicting demands on scarce resources, and

torn by opposing views, fears and disputes as to who should, and who will benefit, or suffer, from the impacts of urban development and change.

As it evolves and matures, urban local government touches ordinary people more and more intimately in their day to day lives: where and how they live, travel, work, shop and play; for how much they can buy (or sell) land and a house; what services they get and at what cost; whether they can be forcibly shifted to make way for a new land use or a big project; what they are allowed to use land for, or build on it; what hazards, dirt, noise or inconvenience they must suffer; and what environmental quality of life they can expect to enjoy in their homes, gardens, streets, neighbourhoods and city centres.

Conflicts and fears of conflicts over public and private objectives, policies, priorities, plans and projects which promise or threaten to change the environment, are increasingly the common problems of local government, particularly in more settled areas where any change must disrupt existing rights, habits or expectations.

Major projects in urban areas take a long time to plan and implement. They affect large numbers of people and need continuing allocations of money over long periods. They cannot be carried through, and more often nowadays can't even be started, without a true consensus between the many different authorities, groups and individuals whose continuing support is essential to the project, or whose opposition can kill it.

Most governmental urban plans and projects get out of date long before they are fully implemented. Some are out of date before they are started. They are often designed to solve specific problems which have since disappeared, or been solved in some other way, or are no longer regarded as problems.

In Australia in particular, we have discovered that big governmental projects and long term plans are highly vulnerable. They can be stopped or made obsolete by, for example:

- * changes in economic conditions and market forces;
- * changes in social attitudes;
- * changes in governments;
- * changes in technology;
- * disputes between levels of governments;
- * lack of co-ordination between authorities;
- * popular protests which develop political force or are translated into direct action such as by refusals of squatters to move, strikes, bans or other tactics by unions, public servants, residents or investors.

In these circumstances, when confronted with paralysing conflicts over big projects, governments can be forced to re-examine basic values and start new processes for determining realistic and feasible objectives, policies and programmes for what a community wants, or is prepared to support.

This was the situation in South Australia between 1970 and 1972 when Adelaide was a battleground of violent conflicts between opposing ideas about urban conservation and development. A number of big projects proposed by State Government and City Council administrations and engineering authorities had to be abandoned in the face of public and resident protests.

The first of these was the 1965-68 Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study (MATS) and its U.S. style engineering plan for 97 miles of costly freeways entirely out of scale with Adelaide's relatively modest traffic needs, and with equally out of scale social and environmental impacts. The outcry from a shocked and unconsulted public was a factor in the fall of a government and the accession to power of Don Dunstan as Premier of the State.

The second was a series of Adelaide City Council plans prepared between 1967 and 1971 for cutting major new north south roads through residential areas of the central City, and for the wholesale acquisition, clearance and comprehensive high density redevelopment of other large areas of the

City. These led to the formation of the North Adelaide Society in 1970 as a new political force of articulate, influential and angry residents. Opponents of the bulldozer approach succeeded in gaining control of Council in June 1971 when William Hayes was elected Lord Mayor and together with other Council members, Jim Bowen, John Chappel and John Roche, began a search for new approaches for the revitalisation of the old central city which was so sadly blighted by neglect and by bad plans.

The third disaster was the State Government's 1967-72 Hackney comprehensive high density residential redevelopment project for 14 acres in the electorate of Don Dunstan. The local residents association successfully influenced the local government election in June 1972, whereupon the bulldozer approach was abandoned by the government.

These projects, planned without consultation of public opinion and without sensitivity to social issues, angered an academic historian, Hugh Stretton, who in August, 1970 published a book called "Ideas for Australian Cities". This outstandingly fresh and vigorous book, and its author, were to become highly influential.

Stretton's values favour the poor over the rich; favour arranging cities for the best care and comfort of women and children as against men; suburban houses with gardens as against flats; public transport over private cars; limiting the growth of old city centres; creating new centres in the suburbs, and new cities, beyond them. By the end of 1972, many of Stretton's policies became Dunstan's policies, and Stretton became the Premier's delegate in most housing and planning matters.

In 1972, the State Premier and the City's Lord Mayor agreed to abandon their attempts to achieve effective plans through the then established bureaucracies.

A new joint State and Council development control authority, the City of Adelaide Development Committee (C.A.D.C.) was established to control City development for an interim period of several years in order to give

the City Council time to conduct a fresh City planning study and produce a comprehensive new City plan, and machinery for its implementation.

The City Council invited proposals from interstate and other foreign consultants, and finally appointed me and my firm to conduct the study and prepare the plan. My client committee comprised the Lord Mayor (then William Hayes) with Councillors Roche, Bowen and Chappel. These four also served on the joint State and Council interim development control authority, together with three State Government nominees, Hugh Stretton, Bob Bakewell (then head of the Premier's own Department) and Newell Platten (then a private architect). These men were my closest official contacts for the next several years.

Their political positions ranged from Stretton's radical and innovative socialism to the practical and paternalistic capitalism of the City's self-made businessmen. However they worked well together as practical Adelaideans and South Australians first, capitalists and socialists second. They were and are proud of their Adelaidean "sense of difference" from other States and cities in Australia.

I was then a foreigner in Adelaide, and so I made it my business to study the cultural history of my clients and hosts. I learnt that this "sense of difference" began with the first settlement of South Australia on the basis of a systematic theory of planned colonisation by self-supporting free settlers seeking liberty of religious conscience and the freedom to get rich.

Adelaide was the first City in Australia, and the only State capital, to be properly planned. It was fully laid out before any permanent settlement was allowed.

Surveyor William Light's far sighted decision in 1836 to locate the City in the middle of a commodious plain midway between the port and the hills, with spare and elegantly simple grids of wide streets, large squares and encircling Park Lands, all beautifully and economically fitted into the natural topography, began a tradition of earnest and

often successful long range planning which has kept recurring in South Australia over the past 143 years.

Because this State is relatively poor in natural resources, and because Adelaide is not strategically located in relation to trade routes or markets, South Australians know that their economic survival depends on their ability to overcome these disadvantages.

This they have tended to do by living simply, calculating carefully, and making bold development plans which involve maximum potential return for minimum expense. These were the features of their successful long term plan under Premier Playford, between 1938 and 1965, which industrialised the State by attracting foreign investment in manufacturing by offering cheap facilities and a low cost structure to foreign companies, and cheap, sensible, State funded, suburban housing to their domicile workers.

South Australians are different from other Australians, according to historians because of the practical use they make of theories of social, economic and physical development. Douglas Pike called South Australia a "paradise of dissent" because of its settlement by religious and political theorists who could not agree with the way life in England was arranged. He wrote in 1957 that even to that date "Other parts of Australia may muddle through in the best British tradition: South Australians zealously attach themselves to some conscious theoretical purpose".

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So the Study began in February 1973. It was my job to design a study to cope with the conflicts in the community and to obtain the fullest participation of the citizenry and special interest groups and at the same time to carry out the ...

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