

2003

Activists' Guide to Metropolitcs

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an ACTIVIST'S GUIDE to metropolitics

**BUILDING COALITIONS
FOR REFORM
IN AMERICA'S
METROPOLITAN AREAS**

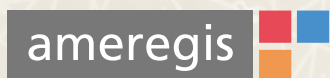
MYRON ORFIELD

METROPOLITAN AREA RESEARCH CORPORATION

AMEREGIS

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*An Activist's Guide to Metropolitics
was produced with the generous support
of the Ford Foundation.*

*Frank Jossi provided background research
and invaluable editorial assistance.*

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AN ACTIVIST'S GUIDE TO METROPOLITICS

Changing society has never been easy. It takes time and commitment from volunteers and organizations. It requires the passion of one group working in conjunction with like-minded souls to push legislators to do the right thing.

It takes convincing people who see no stake in a battle that they do have a stake in the battle. It requires using data to make a case to supporters and to skeptics, to the media and to legislators.


It takes a combination, finally, of persuasive arguments, organizing talent, attention to detail and a keen ability to maintain the enthusiasm of volunteers and nonprofit organizations for, in some cases, several years.

An Activist's Guide to Metropolitcs offers a set of strategies to help you reach your goals. The booklet is broken up into two sections. The first offers answers to commonly asked questions in three important areas of regional reform: fiscal equity, land use and regional governance.

The second part of the guide highlights organizations across the country that have tackled the tricky business of regional reform. We show how a coalition of churches led Minnesota to pass landmark legislation to revive brownfields. We showcase an environmental group in Wisconsin that pushed state lawmakers to pass a smart growth law. We highlight a Cincinnati group's ongoing efforts to push that metropolitan area toward better land use and regional governance. We study how a Chicago business group is changing land-use patterns in the nation's third largest metropolitan area. We learn how a Columbus planning organization built a fruitful relationship with local media.

Along with this guide, readers also have access to an online compendium of maps showcasing demographic and fiscal trends in metropolitan areas across the county, including the 25 largest regions (see the "projects and maps" section of www.ameregis.com).

We hope this guide will be a valuable resource for activists around the nation, and we plan to update it periodically on our web site and newsletters. Feel free to contact us for more information or counsel. While you face enormous struggles in creating more livable, sustainable, transit-friendly and beautiful communities, it is a battle that can be won.



Myron Orfield

HOW TO TALK ABOUT LAND USE



The use of land is one of the more contentious points of metropolitan politics. Addressing the way that land use patterns develop across a region is very important because current growth patterns are unsustainable. The nation's central cities are suffering declining fortunes, and a growing number of suburbs are experiencing similar strains. Low-density development threatens valuable farmland and natural habitat on the urban edge and strains the local budgets of suburbs struggling to provide needed schools, roads and sewer systems.

It is also important because local governments use their planning and zoning powers to compete with other communities in their region for profitable land uses that generate more in tax base than they require in public services.

Consider a few facts. Across the 25 largest metropolitan areas, the amount of urbanized land grew by 46 percent from 1970 to 1990, while the population in those urbanized areas grew by just 20 percent. Regions such as Cincinnati and Milwaukee have grown dramatically in land area while gaining little population.

Rising waves of protest against congestion, disappearing open space and the costs associated with growth suggest that no group — not even the wealthiest suburbs — is fully satisfied with the status quo.

Here are some common issues that arise and some suggested answers.

Don't property owners have the right to do as they wish with land they own?

Only within limits. In fact, the courts have all upheld the right of communities to plan for their futures by regulating the use of land within their borders. Zoning and planning have been part of American culture and law for more than a century. Historic American cities, such as Charleston, Savannah and Washington, DC, were all master-planned. And they remain popular today because they reflect American values and love for architectural beauty, bountiful parkland and pedestrian-friendly plazas and streets.

The United States and our metropolitan area have plenty of land.

Why bother with managing land use since we have more than enough land for everyone?

In fact, many coastal cities do not have an endless supply of developable land. Hemmed in by mountains, marshes, lakes, bays and the sea, some have nearly run out of buildable land. Even if there were limitless land and no boundaries, inefficient land use compounds congestion. Regions such as Atlanta and Houston, with no natural borders, are experiencing enormous problems of congestion, pollution and decline in the urban core. With better planning more land could be saved for open space and older neighborhoods could be revitalized. Most suburbanites don't like sprawl — better land use would help curtail it.

Why can't each city just plan the way it wants to grow?

Local governments oversee many important things within their borders. But the regional coordination of local planning efforts is so important because individual communities can do little on their own to confront the underlying regional forces contributing to sprawl. For example, local growth management rules that limit development in one community may simply push it to other areas, increasing traffic and sending sprawl even further into the countryside. Without a regional plan for protecting open space and farmland, the actions of individual places to control growth can actually make the problems of sprawl worse — not better.

I keep hearing about smart growth. What is it?

Smart growth offers communities an efficient and environmentally-friendly development pattern that aims to preserve open space and agricultural lands, ease traffic congestion by creating a balanced transportation system, and make more efficient use of public investments. Smart growth is development done in a cost-efficient, pedestrian-friendly, transportation-rich way. A real smart growth initiative also involves a strong affordable housing component.

Smart growth has a variety of benefits. First, it creates livable, attractive neighborhoods. It can also provide housing opportunities for low-wage earners in newer, job-rich suburbs and stabilize cities and older suburbs. Smart growth also saves money. An analysis of New Jersey's State Development and Redevelopment Plan, which emphasizes smart growth, found that implementing the plan would reduce the fiscal deficits of local governments by an estimated \$160 million over 20 years, and save an estimated \$1.45 billion in water and sewer infrastructure statewide.

We don't cooperate well in our region. Has smart growth worked anywhere outside of Oregon?

It's worked in likely and unlikely places. At least 16 states have already adopted comprehensive smart growth acts, and their ranks are growing. Regional land-use planning in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Maryland and other states help officials coordinate investments in roads, highways, sewers and utilities. Concurrency requirements like those in Florida mandate that infrastructure be online by the time development takes place. Several states have approved or are considering "fix it first" legislation requiring state agencies to focus spending on repairing existing infrastructure instead of building new facilities. Many states have embraced agricultural and open-space preservation programs.

Doesn't smart growth just limit development?

Smart growth does not seek to curtail development but simply to insure that it's done in a sustainable, efficient way. In fact, places that have used smart growth in planning their region are among the most attractive and fastest-growing in the country. Economic development expert Richard Florida believes the creative class of employees — those with college degrees and high paying jobs — prefer regions with character, social amenities and attractive communities.

What are some other tools to better manage growth?

A variety of techniques are available. One is an urban growth boundary, a border drawn around an urban area to help contain the region's growth in and near already established cities and suburbs. Another similar strategy allows for the construction of sewer and water lines only in defined areas. This doesn't stop development outside the border, it simply makes developers and cities provide those services without assistance from taxpayers elsewhere in the region. Other strategies include "concurrency" requirements that link development approval to the availability of infrastructure, open-space preservation programs and state plans that offer local governments incentives to participate in regional efforts.

Doesn't restricting the supply of land available for development simply increase the cost of housing?

This is a common criticism, largely based on Portland's experience. However, housing prices rose just as fast in other metropolitan areas where population grew dramatically in the 1990s as they did in Portland.

Regardless, a regional affordable housing strategy is an important piece of any regional planning effort. Such initiatives help to reduce the consequences of concentrated poverty on core communities and provide people with real choices concerning where they want to live. One of the best affordable housing strategies is the one in Montgomery County, Maryland, which requires builders and developers to include some affordable units in their projects or pay into a countywide affordable housing fund. Good programs make a concerted effort to include people of color — due in part to subtle housing discrimination, they are often underrepresented in such programs.

This kind of program benefits affluent suburban areas. When these communities don't have enough affordable housing, employees of local businesses — retail establishments, offices, health-care facilities — have to commute from other cities, causing greater congestion on area roads and increasing costs for local businesses.

Shouldn't we worry about gentrification of poor neighborhoods if people begin moving back into the city?

Yes, gentrification is a real concern. As a lower-income neighborhood starts attracting middle-class households, the families that are displaced can find it tremendously difficult to locate new housing they can afford. Inner-city revitalization projects should not be undertaken without addressing the housing needs of low-income households.

But, managed correctly, central cities and older suburbs can also benefit from a diversified housing base. The problems associated with concentrated poverty — everything from high crime to poor health — dramatically limit the opportunities of residents, isolating them from educational, employment and social opportunities. They also place a significant burden on communities' fiscal resources. A regional plan can help communities preserve housing options so there are housing choices for middle-class and poor households in all communities — suburban or urban.

Businesses say they move to the suburbs because that's where the land is, but older areas have lots of abandoned industrial land. What should we do?

Cleaning up brownfields — properties where redevelopment is complicated by the presence or potential presence of contamination — is a strategy being deployed by many communities. Brownfields have major advantages. Once rehabilitated, they offer new businesses and houses access to existing sewer and road systems. Greenfields — undeveloped sites in outlying communities — often require new roads and expensive hookups to regional sewer systems. They also eat up open space and create congestion. The once-rural highways that bring employers to these outlying locations can take years — and millions of dollars — to improve.

Brownfields are not an urban problem alone. In many regions, especially those with military or industrial histories, suburbs have almost as many brownfield sites as cities. Redeveloping older suburbs will likely require transforming plenty of brownfields.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT FISCAL REFORM



A major part of any regional agenda is assuring that all local governments have the financial resources they need to provide important public services. To confront the issues facing low-tax-base communities, equalizing fiscal resources is an important part of the conversation.

Although sometimes an abstract notion, equity-based fiscal reform can be made comprehensible to audiences by using examples from politics and the private sector. By playing to the self-interest of constituents, the advantages of the system will become apparent. For the majority of suburbs, it's a win-win scenario. And for those who pay in more than they receive, there is a silver lining — those places will feel less pressure to develop tax-base-rich commercial and industrial projects to maintain a low-tax, high-service environment.

Here are some common questions raised by residents when looking at this issue.

What is fiscal equity?

Fiscal equity programs are mechanisms for local governments in a region to share both the benefits and the responsibilities of economic development and growth. They do this by reducing inequalities in the resources available to local governments. Among the mechanisms for creating fiscal equity are local-government-aid programs administered by the states and regional tax-base-sharing programs that pool a portion of local governments' tax base and redistribute it more equitably.

What advantages do fiscal equity programs have?

These programs have several benefits. First, they allow tax-base-poor places to compete on a level playing field with their more affluent neighbors. Without such policies, many central cities, inner suburbs and outlying small towns — places living with aging infrastructure, industrial pollution and high levels of poverty — are often forced to tax themselves at a much higher rate than their better-off neighbors to compensate for high costs and relatively meager tax bases. Likewise, many fast-growing bedroom suburbs struggle to provide the public services needed to accommodate their largely residential growth. Meanwhile, the most affluent suburbs — places offering expensive new homes and plentiful commercial development — are able to rely on their significant tax bases to offer high-quality public services at relatively low rates. Reducing inequalities among communities helps address ongoing challenges faced by communities of color, which are more likely to live in low-tax-base places.

Policies promoting fiscal equity also help to make a region operate more efficiently by reducing the incentives for local governments to engage in very costly competition for tax base — competition that, for the most part, simply shifts a given amount of regional tax base from place to place. Every dollar of public resources devoted to this competition — for everything from businesses tax breaks to public provision of new infrastructure — takes money away from other valuable uses like police, fire protection and schools.

Can fiscal equity programs affect land use?

It starts with encouraging wiser land-use decisions. If all governments benefit from development anywhere in the region, they feel less pressure to zone land in their borders only for industrial and commercial uses or high-end homes. Wasteful government competition that occurs when suburbs compete for new development by offering incentives can be reduced. Fights over regional malls and corporate campuses can be diminished, making the choices for those developments based less on local incentives and more on what makes sense for the region at large.

It sounds like communism. Are there actual examples of fiscal equity?

Fiscal-equity programs already exist in every state. Virtually all state governments distribute resources to local school districts to help cover costs associated with education. In fact, on average states provide nearly 50 percent of local school spending. In addition, state funding comprises 18 percent of local municipal budgets, which cover services like police and fire protection and libraries. Several regions in the country have established programs for municipalities to share a portion of their tax base with one another.

A similar process, revenue sharing, has been part and parcel of every professional sports league except Major League Baseball, and many critics have suggested it may be the answer to the competitive disadvantages faced by teams in small markets. The NFL, the NBA and the NHL all share revenue generated by media contracts to equalize the resources available to teams, thereby allowing small market teams like Green Bay Packers to be able to pay salaries large enough to compete with large market teams such as the New York Giants or the Chicago Bears.

I live in a suburb. What will my community get out of fiscal equity programs?

For most suburbs, better services and lower taxes, in a nutshell.

Most people do not understand just how unequally tax resources are distributed in their regions. Just about a third of metropolitan area residents reside in middle-class communities facing little poverty or other social strains. And only a fraction of those live in affluent places with large tax bases due to expensive homes and, in most cases, plenty of commercial development.

But many suburban residents just assume that their town will be a net loser in fiscal-equity reforms, when the reality is that many suburbanites live in places that stand to gain. For example, in most metropolitan areas, anywhere from 60 percent to 75 percent of residents live in communities that would benefit from regionwide tax-base sharing.

Fiscal equity efforts support a fairer distribution of basic services and help struggling suburban communities find new life with greater resources to rebuild roads, sewers and neighborhoods.

But I live in one of those suburbs with a strong commercial base and expensive homes. Why should my community share its tax base?

Though they are not as obvious, there still are reasons for communities like yours to participate in regional fiscal-equity efforts. First, if other communities are also perceived as attractive places to live and work, it will reduce the pressure for development in your community. That, in turn, can bolster local efforts to reduce traffic congestion and preserve open space.

But the most important reason is that regions rise and fall together. If most of your region is struggling to maintain services and attract economic development, it is likely not faring well in the national competition for jobs and residents. For example, studies show median household incomes of suburbs and cities of a metropolitan area rise and fall together and that metropolitan areas with the smallest gap between city and suburban incomes have greater regional job growth. In addition, in large metropolitan areas, income growth in central cities results in income growth and house-value appreciation in the suburbs.

Winners in the global race will be attractive, balanced regions, not those with a declining urban core and one or two wealthy suburban enclaves.

I'm a city resident and I'm tired of seeing my taxes support road and sewer expansion in the suburbs while my neighborhood is declining. How will fiscal reform help the city?

Despite a rebirth of some downtowns and urban neighborhoods, the nation's central cities are still suffering. The reality is that they still house and educate a large percentage of the nation's poor, without much help from surrounding communities. Regional fiscal reforms can complement existing revitalization efforts by providing cities with more money for redevelopment and to deal with social and economic problems that continue to plague them. Reducing the incentives for tax-base competition will also help cities to retain the economic activity — and tax base — currently located there.

Tell me more about tax-base sharing. Has it been tried anywhere?

Yes. The largest effort is Fiscal Disparities Program in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Since 1971, the nearly 200 local governments in the seven-county region have contributed 40 percent of the growth in their commercial-industrial tax bases to a regional pool each year. The funds in the regional pool are then redistributed back to local governments according to the strength of their tax bases. Tax-base-poor communities get back more than they paid in to the pool, while tax-base-rich communities get back less. In 2000, the program reduced the tax-base disparities among local governments by 25 percent. Tax-base sharing in the Twin Cities has helped its core cities and at-risk suburbs remain relatively healthy, and contributed to the Twin Cities' ranking as one of the nation's best places to live.

A smaller program in the New Jersey Meadowlands has helped officials there guide development in an environmentally-friendly way. By guaranteeing that all 14 Meadowlands communities share the benefits of development, no matter where in the district it occurs, they have been able to reduce the competition for tax base — and direct development to the areas best suited for it.

I'm not sure tax-base sharing will work here, so give me some other ideas of how fiscal equity can be achieved.

Another good option is to reform state municipal-aid programs. These programs could be modeled after school-aid programs, which are often designed to increase equity among school districts. State aid for municipalities can ensure that all places have the resources to support services that we all would consider essential — among them public safety, streets and sanitation services.

Some efforts to improve the fiscal well-being of municipalities can be counterproductive. For example, some cities have been allowed to impose special taxes unavailable to other municipalities in their regions. But special taxes can actually hurt the competitiveness of these cities because they make them more expensive places to do business than nearby suburbs.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT REGIONAL GOVERNANCE



Every metropolitan area in the country faces the problems of unbalanced growth — concentrated poverty, fiscal disparities, growing traffic congestion and sprawl. The need for regional governance reflects this reality.

With dozens and sometimes hundreds of municipalities comprising regions, addressing problems that affect entire regions is a serious challenge. Modern metropolitan problems are simply too large for any one local government to address alone.

Regional governance is not a new idea. In fact, federal law already requires that every major region in the country have a body, called a “metropolitan planning organization” (MPO), to coordinate transportation spending in the region. Reform of existing organizations like these is one approach to improving coordination within a region.

But however it’s done, regional governance raises all sorts of questions. Many residents do not entirely understand precisely how a regional organization might guide and influence regional development patterns.

Here are some common questions audiences raise:

Why should I support regional governance?

Actually, most regions already have some form of regional government, but the existing, unelected organizations are not accountable to the citizens they serve. Establishing responsive regional governance is so important because the physical boundaries of elected units of government do not correspond to the regional scale of many service and infrastructure needs.

Many individuals and organizations working to address the effects of concentrated poverty, segregation and sprawl — including business leaders, environmental and historic preservation organizations, and affordable housing and poverty advocates—are all beginning to recognize that this political fragmentation and lack of regional oversight is hindering their long-term success.

Regional governments can oversee efforts to help direct growth into built-up areas while maintaining green space and rural character in outlying areas. They can also coordinate transportation and land-use decisions and help deal with planning mistakes of the past. Consider, for example, that the U.S. has zoned 10 times more land for commercial and industrial development than will ever be built. A regional body could study local conditions to determine whether that land could be better used for housing, mixed-use projects or open space.

It sounds like communism. Isn't having political power spread across communities a good thing?

It's all about the right balance. The current situation is akin to what happened to the U.S. under the Articles of Confederation. The Articles, the nation's first governing document, severely limited the power of the central government in favor of the states. But the national government was simply not powerful enough to manage many of the new nation's responsibilities, such as trade and foreign affairs, and it foundered. Leaders eventually drafted and approved the Constitution, which allocated more powers to the federal government, while still giving the states powers most appropriately exercised at that level.

Metropolitan regions need to move from their current situation — much like the U.S. under the Articles of Confederation — toward a more effective distribution of powers, similar to that outlined in the Constitution. In fact, effective regional efforts strike a balance by allowing local control over issues best addressed by local governments, while promoting cooperation on larger issues affecting the entire region, such as highway and sewer investments, affordable housing, transit, land-use planning, air and water quality and economic development. A regional authority may also be the appropriate venue for services such as transit, water and sewer systems — services where economies of scale can provide significant cost savings.

What's in it for the suburbs?

Regional governance benefits suburbs in different ways. It assists fast-growing, low tax-base suburbs in limiting their growth to the level that they can effectively manage and getting the infrastructure they need to support it. It can help more affluent suburbs reduce high rates of congestion and preserve open space by distributing growth more widely in the region. Those kinds of policies also help revitalize older suburbs that are struggling with population losses and aging infrastructure.

In addition, many suburbs are home to business leaders who understand that their region's health is judged as much by the region's core as the enclaves in which they reside. Regional efforts to manage growth provide an alternative to no-growth moratoriums or slow-growth movements that can restrict economic growth.

Regional government sounds like something the Democratic Party came up with.

In fact, that is not the case. Progressive Republicans in Portland, Minneapolis-St.Paul and Indianapolis led efforts to create regional government. Strong land-use laws were signed by then-governors Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania and Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin, both currently members of the Bush administration. Former HUD secretary Jack Kemp (currently co-chair of Empower America) is a champion of fair housing laws. A Republican governor forwarded Oregon's powerful land-use act. Indianapolis' consolidation with Marion County occurred when now-Senator Richard Lugar was mayor of that city, and was nurtured by successive Republican mayors William Hudnut and Steve Goldsmith.

Doesn't regionalism dilute the political power of communities of color?

This is a real concern — and one of the fears associated with gentrification and strategies to address concentrated poverty. Many communities of color fear the loss of political control and cultural identity that can result from regionalism. But there are regional strategies that address this concern. Scholar John Powell advocates an approach he calls "federated regionalism." Federated regionalism allows cities or communities to retain their political and cultural institutions while sharing in regional resources. Under such an arrangement, local governments cooperate on some issues and maintain local autonomy on others. Strategies like these can assure that minority groups don't lose their hard-fought political powers and community cohesiveness, while still allowing regions to address regional problems.

Tell me more about MPOs — what are they?

Often little known by citizens, MPOs are the most popular form of regional governance in the country. Mandated by Congress in the 1970s to address growing transportation problems, MPOs gained additional power in the 1990s with the passage of two major transportation acts, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA-91) and the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21, 1998). MPOs now make decisions involving millions of transportation dollars — more money than most cities in a region spend on roads and transit. But their ability to address broader land-use patterns — often patterns that contribute to the very congestion they are trying to ameliorate — is very limited.

But these groups aren't the government, are they?

Yes, they are the government — an unelected government. With millions of dollars flowing through MPOs, many critics believe the current system represents taxation without representation. Activists face the challenge of making these sometimes shadowy regional governments more effective on issues of growth and more visible and accountable to the people they serve. The membership of regional bodies should be apportioned by population, and ideally, directly elected by the people.

Are there other options to expanding the power of our MPO?

Yes. Intergovernmental cooperation can be improved by strengthening other existing regional bodies — councils of government, regional planning commissions, and so forth — that help communities make land-use decisions and provide specific regional services. Like MPOs, they often work in relative obscurity without much media coverage or citizen involvement. Also like MPOs, their power to enact significant regional reforms — and in some cases, their interest in doing so — are limited. Empowered with better tools, they could make greater headway on a whole host of regional issues, such as land-use planning, housing and redevelopment efforts, and the protection of farmland and other open spaces.

There is also a role for states in coordinating regional cooperation among localities. State governments could assist regions with planning and offer incentives to encourage municipalities to enact planning and zoning rules consistent with the statewide goals. Such efforts might include giving them priority for technical assistance, streamlined permitting and an array of spending initiatives. States are taking steps in this direction. For example, Wisconsin's new smart growth law encourages communities undergoing comprehensive planning to share and seek approval from neighboring communities.

What can citizens do to influence existing regional agencies?

MPOs and other planning groups can be pressured to make appropriate land use and transportation decisions. Since they are unelected, activists have to make these organizations accountable for their actions by casting press attention in their direction and by lobbying at meetings. They can also lobby the state legislature to make existing regional agencies respond to public pressure by holding elections for representatives.

*“Never doubt that a group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”
— Margaret Mead*

LESSONS ON REGIONAL COALITION BUILDING

As a long-time student of social change, I have arrived at 10 basic lessons of coalition building of the kind required to bring change to metropolitan areas. Creating an environment for change is never easy, but with a game plan and a strategy to involve as many organizations as possible, you can see real movement on issues.

Here are the lessons I have found useful:

- 1 Understand the region's demographics and make maps. Develop an accurate and comprehensive picture of the region by understanding growth management, transportation planning and the potential for state aid to help counties and suburbs. Use comparisons with other regions. Our maps of the 25 largest metropolitan areas are available at www.ameregis.com. Use them with elected officials, citizens' groups and newspaper reporters to make your case.
 - 2 Reach out on a personal level. Political persuasion is selling an idea to another person or group with power. Make connections to other groups and individuals who can help your cause before announcing problems and disparities. Invite input, and share ownership of the effort.
 - 3 Build a broad, inclusive coalition. The coalition should stress the themes that it's in the short-term interest of the region's residents to solve problems of polarization, and it's in their short-term interest as well. Play to suburban self-interest. Low-tax-base suburbs support tax sharing because it gives them lower taxes and better services. High tax-base suburbs support it so they can protect natural places they value, and it may serve them well in managing their supply of affordable housing.
 - 4 "It's the suburbs, stupid!" Regionalism has to be a suburban issue to alter the political environment. Working-class suburbs will not love you immediately, but keep talking. Bedroom communities choking on growth can see the loss of open space and continued growth as costing a great deal and may be open to regionalism.
 - 5 Reach into the central cities to make sure the message is understood. Metropolitan reforms cannot be seen as alternatives to existing programs but rather as reforms that complement those already in place. Fair housing should be seen a strategy that allows individuals to choose where they live rather than a strategy for fracturing inner-city communities. Make the case that overwhelming inner-city problems can be ameliorated with regionalism.
 - 6 Seek out the region's religious community. Is it moral to divide a region into two communities, one prosperous, the other struggling? That's a compelling moral argument. Ask the religious community if it is moral to allow cities to rot while farmland is destroyed in the name of growth. Churches understand civil rights, and they understand how to reach skeptics in the inner-ring suburbs and the inner city. And they have a role in promoting the city since the cost of shuttering inner-city churches and building new ones in the suburbs has become onerous.
 - 7 Seek out the philanthropic community, establish reform groups and appeal to business leaders. Business and philanthropic organizations are increasingly important in influencing policy makers regarding regional cooperation. Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group, the Greater Baltimore Committee and Chicago Metropolitan 2020 are among the national leaders in regional reform.
 - 8 Draw in distinct but compatible issues and organizations. Churches, communities of color, environmental organizations, women's groups and seniors can all be drawn into the debate over land use and metropolitan governance. So can preservationists.
 - 9 Prepare for controversy. Reform requires many tough battles. This is how real reform takes place. Continually emphasize the message of the common good and the benefits to individual communities in the region.
 - 10 Move simultaneously on several fronts and accept compromises. Get as many issues moving as can be effectively managed, but not too many. Keep several bills on these issues moving at once. A governor may sign one and not another, but some legislation passed is better than none.
-

Remember, none of this will come easy, but regionalism is a worthy goal that can appeal to the political proclivities of any audience. And it is well within the context of American political history and thought.

At a time when states and municipalities are feeling significant budget pressures, the argument for regionalism only grows stronger. By consolidating power and sharing resources, communities can function better. Regionalism can deliver more efficient services and stronger transportation and regional planning that can actually save communities money — while saving green space, creating more attractive neighborhoods and redeveloping urban and suburban areas.

CASE STUDY:

BECOMING A REGIONAL POWERHOUSE – AN INTERFAITH GROUP MOVES MICHIGAN’S POLITICIANS TO ACT

In 2003 several suburban Detroit state legislators shot down a proposal to create a regional transit organization for the Motor City. Even though the same proposal had passed the legislature only months earlier — a move which was vetoed by then Governor John Engler on his way out of office — legislators saw the measure as simply giving too much money to Detroit.

“One of the legislators said it would be like ‘throwing money down a black hole,’” says Victoria Kovari, chief strategist for MOSES, short for Metropolitan Organizing Strategies Enabling Strength. Kovari says she believes the double entendre of “black hole” was intentionally racial since Detroit is largely an African-American city. Despite the support of Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm, the Big Three auto companies, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce and many elected officials in the city and suburbs, MOSES vainly attempted to convince suburban Republican senators that regional transit made sense but faced opposition at every turn.

After the bill’s failure, the governor did an end-run around the legislature and produced a historic agreement between the mayor of Detroit and executives representing Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties to create the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DARTA). “It’s an intergovernmental agreement they decided they could do and the governor approved it,” she says. “It’s historic because Metro Detroit has never had any regional transportation authority — until now.”

Call it a win for MOSES and other transit activists, but not an unlikely one. MOSES is moving the equivalent of the Red Sea in Michigan politics, becoming a major force on issues of metropolitan equity. For the past six years few



groups in Michigan have wielded the influence MOSES has in pressuring local and state politicians to think beyond their own borders and conceive of Detroit as a region rather than as a collection of entities.

As the DARTA debate and the city’s own history reveals, Detroit is riven with complex socio-ethnic and geographic divisions. Thinking as a region comes as a challenge in a metropolitan area where most of the jobs, growth and commercial real estate continues to be located in outlying areas. And Detroit, while showing signs of a potentially dramatic comeback, has for years represented urban America at its most depressing and dysfunctional.

Few would argue the once great city has declined over the past 50 years in a process that began in the 1950’s and accelerated after the riots of 1968. MOSES aims to turn the city around and to help its inner-ring suburbs deal with their own aging infrastructure, poverty and assorted social problems by creating a metropolitan majority between Detroit and its suburbs. MOSES’ members see this strategy as the only way to successfully enact regional solutions.

To that end the organization managed to get both gubernatorial candidates — and many metro legislators — to sign on to a platform called “Fix It First” in 2002. The proposal directs the state to spend 90 percent of infrastructure monies on repairing and maintaining

existing roads and calls for creating a land use and smart growth state commission.

On the first issue, Granholm vetoed 34 road projects in this year's budget. The Republicans answered by passing a bill to reinstate all of the projects. The governor vetoed the bill but after much political maneuvering around the budget, she agreed to allow funding for half of the projects.

"Most of the projects that stayed were interchange improvements. The big ticket ones were not put back on the table," explains Kovari. "It's not a perfect victory, but it was a victory for us. She stuck to her guns and she took over \$1 billion in freeway expansion off the table."

On the second issue, Granholm formed the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council in February 2003, appointing 26 bi-partisan members, among them MOSES president and local clergyman Kevin Turman. Michigan is now planting the seeds of smart growth that should begin to contain sprawl and create more livable cities in the future.

MOSES is accustomed to victories large and small. Formed in the mid-1990s, the group grew out of an interfaith organization that had become involved in several community issues, among them a successful campaign to save a swimming pool in Detroit. Later, that organization joined two others to participate in creating MOSES. The organization has grown to 80 member congregations in metropolitan Detroit with about 65 percent from the City of Detroit, the rest in the suburbs. Although primarily composed of religious activists, MOSES counts the University of Michigan and the University of Detroit Mercy among its members.

MOSES' first success as a large umbrella organization came when it convinced then drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey to name Detroit a "High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area." The program brought \$10 million in federal funding to law enforcement agencies in Southeast Michigan to bolster efforts to stop drug sales and treat addicts. In 1999, the group built 60 houses in southwest Detroit called "Newbury Homes," a \$12 million housing development for low- and moderate-income families.

In 2000, MOSES rallied to stop a huge cut in the state's budget for public transit and actually managed to add \$50 million to it. Kovari says the win proved short-lived. The legislature came back a year later and lopped \$50 million off the transportation budget, negating the increase.

That hasn't slowed MOSES' activism. After meeting with dozens of suburban mayors and city managers, it held a summit on transportation and created a "Metro Allies"

group composed of business leaders, environmentalists, labor union activists and metropolitan planning organization (MPO) representatives. The group met monthly to discuss transportation issues and eventually christened itself the "Michigan Suburbs Alliance."

Personal persuasion mixed with research tools, among them maps created by Ameregis, built a convincing argument for seeing Detroit as a region rather than as a series of suburbs outside a city. "We identified and then met with the power brokers in the region," she explains. "We have trained leaders on metro equity who can go and discuss regional issues with them, using PowerPoint presentations to show our platform and to exhibit [MARC-and] Ameregis-produced maps. They help to reveal the dramatic regional inequity you see in metro Detroit."

MOSES hired a consultant to work with the alliance members on structuring the organization and now it is self-sufficient. Meanwhile, MOSES regularly carries out "Safe Zones" in neighborhoods around their churches, an effort intended to identify crime hot spots and pressure the police to take action. And most recently the group has challenged certification of the local MPO, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, by the Federal Housing Administration asserting that transportation funding in the region tends to flow away from the places where most low-income people and minorities live.

A full agenda, to say the least. MOSES continues to train cadres of leaders and place them in roles where they have an opportunity to speak to elected officials. While having a religious orientation does not always sway legislators, it has an impact on the media and on citizens. "When we raise the moral dimension in relation to issues people respond," she says. "We made transportation a moral issue and it came across well."

The growing power of MOSES was best exhibited September 29th, 2002, when more than 5,000 people from Metropolitan Detroit, Ann Arbor, Saginaw, Kalamazoo and eight other states gathered at Greater Grace Temple in Detroit. "Never before had thousands of people from the city and suburbs, different denominations, races, cultures and ages pledged to work together for greater equity in how our region's resources are used and to hold politicians accountable to their commitments," Kovari says. "It was a great day." 🌟

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Do dozens of one-on-ones to create a group of metropolitan allies around issues (key groups in region/state: corporate, labor, environmental and others). Do not settle for a loose coalition of weak groups. Use a well-trained task force for this exercise.
- 2 Infiltrate existing regional power blocs by speaking to representatives.
- 3 Carry out actions on regional targets and/or state officials to demand representation or support for legislation.
- 4 Create position statements on issues, outlining principles and specific realistic policy changes.
- 5 Get endorsements of position statements from city and suburban congregations and other key institutions, allies and politicians.
- 6 Hold press conferences and meet with editorial boards to publicize your positions.
- 7 Organize congregational outreach campaigns around issues to solidify the support of current allies and to recruit new ones.
- 8 Convene issue summits and/or large public meetings to announce plans, solidify and get commitments from public officials.
- 9 Organize coalitions of city and suburban officials from older suburbs to form a regional resource-sharing group like the Michigan Suburbs Alliance.
- 10 Identify city and suburban champions on issues.
- 11 Don't limit yourself to a single issue. After an initial success, move to the next level by taking on a new target.
- 12 When ready, pull the trigger on action!



CASE STUDY:

USING THE MEDIA TO MAKE YOUR CASE

Understanding how the media works and how you can influence coverage is an absolute necessity in creating a debate over regional issues. Finding reporters and editors willing to write about these often complex matters can be challenging and time-consuming, but the reward can be significant changes to your region.

Consider Columbus, OH, a fast-growing and vibrant state capital and university town where free-wheeling growth threatens to overwhelm the region with sprawl and gridlocked highways. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), a voluntary association of governments in and around Columbus, began a campaign in the late 1990s to move regional issues onto the local newspaper's editorial page just as local residents began to feel the pinch of traffic and evaporating open space.

The Columbus Dispatch, the region's major newspaper, was hardly a beacon for progressive thinking on regional issues, but that did not stop MORPC's manager of government relations, Kimberly Gibson, from attempting to change its opinion. Over the past six years, she's worked to get her organization's members in front of the newspaper's editorial board. As transportation and land-use issues arose, Gibson would call the editorial board for discussions showcasing MORPC's research.

"We'd create opportunities to talk to the editorial board on things that were happening in the region," she says. "We'd bring people from our organization as well as people in the community who got it [regionalism] and who could advocate for one or two things we were there to discuss."

Around the same time, Gibson began cultivating a relationship with Brian Williams, a reporter who covers transportation for the Dispatch. Since MORPC focuses



more on research than advocacy, Williams began to trust it as a good source for comments on transit issues — a huge and continuing news story in the region.

"He finally started asking the right questions, and he always calls us before writing a story," she says. "It took us years! Although he doesn't always have time to connect the dots, research-wise, we're getting him the data to allow readers to draw their own conclusions."

Meanwhile, the editorial board, historically conservative and free-market inclined, began to see the point of better land-use and sewer planning and increased mass-transit spending. "They've gone from very conservative to moderate in a span of five years on transit, sewer and water issues and how they require regional solutions," says Gibson. "What sold them was the cost of services — the economic argument. The board wrote several editorials on the 'myopic' planning for growth in this region and how that practice would hurt the regional economy into the future."

The paper even threw its support behind tax-base sharing, endorsing a pilot project involving four communities and overseen by their economic development directors, who had grown tired of "stealing" proposed mall projects from one another, she says.

Getting the Dispatch's endorsement of planning policies, as well as greater news coverage of regional issues, is clearly worth celebrating. No other news media outlet in

Columbus has the power and influence of the Dispatch. “What’s been critical is the metamorphosis of the Dispatch editorial board; they now get it,” she says. “They make a difference on whether we succeed or not. They get regionalism.”

As important as the Dispatch is to MORPC’s agenda, Gibson had made sure to get the message out to other media outlets. Columbus has a strong chain of suburban newspapers that covers plenty of issues important to MORPC, the Suburban News. While community newspapers suffer high staff turnover rates, Gibson always tries to “spend time with new reporters to explain to them our positions and to treat them with respect.” As she knows, suburban reporters often end up at larger dailies covering regional issues.

The city’s alternative newspaper, The Other Paper, uses MORPC’s research and staff to bolster articles that often look critically at coverage of local planning issues. And the Columbus affiliate of National Public Radio, WOSU, has aired features on growth and used speakers from MORPC or advocates of regionalism as guests for talk shows.

Another strategy to keep regional issues in the news is to have advocates make presentations to civic groups that,

in turn, attract media coverage. The Metropolitan Club of Columbus has held debates on growth covered by reporters from various media organizations, and MORPC’s own “Regional Development Forum,” jointly presented with the Columbus Chamber of Commerce always captures attention.

Gibson has shied away from reaching out to television news stations since regionalism is simply too complex to delineate in three-minute segments. If anything, Gibson and other regionalism advocates fear that television reporters will spin the story negatively. Better to use print media, which have the time, energy and staff to explain regionalism and to delve into its intrinsic issues such as transit, sewer line expansion, taxation and land use, she believes.

In dealing with the media, Gibson warns that the regionalism agenda will take time. Reporters and editors have short-term memories and need to be reminded constantly that events are happening or issues are arising. Keeping them interested should remain a priority, even if it will not be easy. Says Gibson: “It’s been a lot of little efforts that have, fortunately, worked.” 🍷



LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Nurture a relationship with the local editorial boards of your most powerful newspapers, even if they initially disagree with you.
- 2 Develop relationships with key daily reporters who cover transit, local government and related beats. Regionalism is a huge issue of the kind an aggressive reporter will love and may be able to turn into a series of articles.
- 3 Do not disregard community and suburban newspapers. They get read, often more closely than daily city newspapers. Know the editors and writers who cover topics related to regionalism.
- 4 Although the Columbus business magazine and newspaper press has been less interested in regionalism, advocates in other communities have found business reporters open to writing about public-policy issues as they relate to development and transit.
- 5 Public-radio stations in most cities maintain a healthy interest in taxation, transit, land use and regional governance. Push to get on their talk shows and cultivate a reporter who has an interest in these topics. Listen often to discover who that reporter is.
- 6 Follow the tried-and-true media strategy of sending out press releases announcing important events and speakers. Do not overwhelm reporters with too many of them. Be selective. Avoid meaningless releases that announce nothing. Send releases via e-mail when possible; most reporters prefer it. Follow up with a phone call.
- 7 If you have established a relationship with a reporter, send releases to that individual. If you have yet to make a relationship with anyone, send releases both to the news editor and one of the staff reporters most likely to be interested.
- 8 Pay attention to deadlines. Every reporter has a deadline and it's usually just a few hours or a few days off. Respect that and get journalists the information or experts as soon as you can. Ask reporters for their deadlines and work within that time frame.
- 9 Be willing to follow up questions with research. Reporters need as much factual material as possible, even if not all of it ends up in print. Be prepared with experts, fact sheets and any other materials that present your case in a convincing style.
- 10 Avoid television. Local television news likes to create fear mongering among suburban viewers, especially when issues of land-use control arise. Participate in segments when requested by a news reporter but do not seek their coverage. Television news lives on controversy and simplicity that brings high ratings, not the kind of understanding and complexity that regionalism requires.
- 11 Keep at it. It could take more than a year to see stories emerge. Remember, news organizations are copycats, to a degree. If one publication does something, others will likely follow.

CASE STUDY:

GRASS-ROOTS ACTIVISM LAYS A FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE IN CINCINNATI

Good organizing often starts by getting individuals and organizations to work together at the grass-roots level. Starting small can lead to big things.

A group of Cincinnatians started Citizens For Civic Renewal (CCR) in 1999 to empower citizens to engage in decision-making with government officials and business leaders. The original purpose was related to good governance — enabling citizens to have a seat at the table. About two years ago, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation granted funds to CCR to hire MARC to study sprawl, and that issue quickly grew into a major focus for the organization.

Greg Harris, who joined CCR as executive director in 2000, took the data and began a campaign to convince local communities that sprawl was killing the core of Cincinnati and destroying thousands of acres of greenfields every year. And Cincinnati's regional population was not even growing much, making the argument for greater management of land even more germane.

He took his case to Kiwanis and other civic groups rather than holding public meetings because he knew he had to convince people who weren't the usual suspects. Environmentalists and planners already understood the potential for regional cooperation in Cincinnati, he figured, but small-business people and suburban politicians might be a different story.

The audience he sought consisted of those with an open mind who had not heard of tax-base sharing or considered the importance of regional government. They often did not see the local metropolitan planning organization as a government, a point Harris raised time and again.

Using maps produced by Myron Orfield and his staff, Harris presented a vision for Cincinnati to 4,000 people. The vision is quite different from the way the region has



evolved up until now. Although they are more conservative than residents of many other metropolitan areas, Cincinnatians are beginning to embrace smarter growth. As the media has paid more attention to sprawl, the message of CCR has begun to capture adherents.

The region has been subjected to several mall closings and “mall wars” where communities have competed against one another by offering incentives, Harris says. These highly publicized issues have also shed light on the region's burgeoning sprawl, alongside a seriously declining core city.

Harris started his presentations with photographs of sprawl, combined with those of small towns, pastoral settings and strip malls. He asked audiences to rate what image they liked best, and invariably the pastoral setting was selected. He would inquire about what assets they like about the region and he heard about parks, trees and older, attractive, compact neighborhoods.

And he spoke of Cincinnati as a region, not a city, competing nationally and globally. “Many of the people in the audience haven't really thought about these issues,” he says. “Most people are hearing about it for the first time.”

With audiences in general agreement about what they would like the region to look like, Harris segued into a discussion of land-use planning and the need for cooperation among communities. In a community where a fiscal argument can win the day, Harris liked to emphasize that sprawl costs more than coordinated, planned development. He talked about how population gains have strained even newer suburbs, which are struggling to build schools fast enough to accommodate all the new students.

Shifting to tax-base sharing, he pointed to professional sports leagues, such as the NFL and NBA, that use similar programs. The argument worked well in sports-crazed Cincinnati. He also noted that in the Cincinnati region — where only 25 percent of the communities are gaining population — a great majority would benefit from tax-base sharing. “When I talk to local officials about this, using the maps, I usually hear ‘wow’ when I tell them 75 percent of communities would benefit,” he says. “This is a good outreach that works with reasonable people.”

Through alliances with other stakeholders, CCR has created a steering committee of more than three dozen public and private agencies — ranging from chambers of commerce to the Sierra Club, from unions to planning departments — that collaboratively produced a series of anti-sprawl policy recommendations.

The group also has received plenty of favorable press in the daily Cincinnati Post, the local weekly alternative newspaper and from a regional National Public Radio affiliate. The conservative Cincinnati Enquirer remains unconvinced and labels the group’s efforts pie-in-the-sky, says Harris.

Still, CCR hasn’t stopped trying to sell the editorial page on land-use planning and tax-base sharing, and reporters continue to cover the organization in its news section. Although the message hasn’t moved the local political establishment to take action just yet, committees of CCR

continue to press for smart growth, capital-improvement projects, transit planning and campaign and public-school reform. Harris would like to see more research on sprawl statewide, too, so that the support for a cooperative, regional approach to land-use planning would represent an even broader geographic area.

Harris left the organization in 2003, but CCR remains a player in the region. “The CCR will continue to pursue our mission of empowering citizens and serving as a catalyst for civic action,” says Julie Olberding, the current executive director. She cites three priorities. “The first is to increase our membership and strengthen our relationships with other civic groups and religious organizations in order to further amplify the voice of citizens in greater Cincinnati. The second is to enhance the productivity of our task forces, which include economic development, education, governance, housing, social equity and transportation.

“Last — but certainly not least — is to work toward the adoption and implementation of regional strategies. We are encouraging more coordination among local governments on land-use planning and other relevant areas. We’re promoting a metropolitan-wide transit system and providing more affordable housing throughout the region. As we build our organization we eventually bring change to the Cincinnati region.” 🌟

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Seek your audience. Convince the unconvinced, then preach to the choir.
- 2 Use visuals. Maps highlighting social and fiscal trends within metropolitan areas — available from MARC and other sources — can tell the story quickly.
- 3 Make your arguments elementary in the beginning. Define land use — many lay audiences haven’t even thought about the issue, or know anything about it. Take nothing for granted when describing current and potential future policies.
- 4 Use images of sprawl and good planning.
- 5 Invite audiences to imagine their region and their communities in 10 years. Audience involvement works!
- 6 Showcase how tax-base sharing can help communities already in fiscal trouble as well as booming communities that are struggling to pay for the costs of growth.
- 7 Use the media to get the message out. Find a reporter at every press outlet who will cover your group and write about your ideas. Work the editorial page writers too.

CASE STUDY:

BUSINESS LEADS CHARGE FOR CHANGE IN CHICAGO

As Chicago's most important civic organization, the Commercial Club has weighed in on many important issues in its 100-year history. When the Chicago region began sprawling badly in the 1980s and 1990s, the Commercial Club decided to look at the issue closely and do something about it.

In 1996 the organization created a project called "The Metropolis Report" to study regional issues ranging from concentrations of poverty to transportation systems in the nation's third-largest metropolitan area. More than 200 members of the club looked at six areas — education, economic development, taxation, governance, transportation/land use and housing — before submitting recommendations.

The two-year effort resulted in "*Chicago Metropolis 2020: Preparing Chicago for the 21st Century*," now available from the University of Chicago Press. The report is a well-researched document that, like many studies of this sort, usually winds up as a doorstep or gathering dust on a shelf.

That's not going to happen to this report, its creators say. The Commercial Club created a separate organization, Chicago Metropolis 2020, to do follow-up analysis and lobby at the state legislature to make changes recommended in the initial and subsequent reports. To add to Chicago Metropolis' strength, some of the biggest hitters on the Chicago business scene signed on to take the lead.

Donald G. Lubin, the group's chairman, was a partner in a major Chicago law firm; George Ranney, Jr., president and chief executive officer, was an attorney and former executive at Inland Steel Industries; and Frank Beal, executive director, served as a former president of an Inland operating division. Also in the mix was Adele Simmons, former president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



It's hardly out of character for the Commercial Club to embark on such an ambitious project. The club hired planner Daniel Burnham to design the 1909 Plan for Chicago, which produced the city's remarkable necklace of lakeside parks. And in the 1980s, when the city's economy dimmed in comparison to other regions, the Commercial Club's Jobs for Metropolitan Chicago launched programs to attract and create jobs.

Charles Wheelan, director of policy and communications for Chicago Metropolis, says the region's labor unions have also joined forces with the business community in pushing the goals of the Metropolis 2020 plan. The Chicago Federation of Labor sees that smart growth is important to their members because it creates jobs, prevents sprawl and produces the kind of housing union workers can afford.

"Business and labor agree that they have to work together on the challenge of housing 1.8 million new people in the region in the next 20 years," he says.

As part of the Commercial Club's plan, Chicago Metropolis 2020 will expire after 10 years. In that light, the organization has been busy not only churning out annual reports that add to the knowledge gained in the first report but also lobbying at the state legislature. Six bills carrying the imprimatur of the Metropolis 2020 were introduced in the legislature in spring 2003 alone, with one of the key laws being a housing act that creates a mechanism to plan for and construct affordable housing.

The bill calls for communities to have a plan to build more workforce housing and changes state incentives to encourage more affordable units in the suburbs, he says. “We think train stations are a likely spot to put affordable housing, yet currently many municipalities zone that kind of use out,” Wheelan says.

Another bill receiving strong support calls for studying the consolidation of transit-planning efforts into one large interagency coordinating committee to serve the Chicago region. An early childhood education bill, another goal of Metropolis 2020, is gathering support, helped along by advocates such as Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago economics professor James Heckman.

The organization is also lobbying to create a system for juvenile offenders modeled on one in Ohio. Currently, Illinois counties that sent juveniles to a state facility pay nothing for their incarceration, estimated at \$50,000 per inmate annually. But counties incur the entire cost of local rehabilitation, a situation that creates the perverse incentive to send youthful offenders to state institutions. The new legislation would grant money to counties that treat underage offenders locally rather than sending them off to state institutions, says Wheelan.

Having business, labor and community members supporting this kind of legislation and calling politicians to lobby on behalf of the bills makes an enormous difference, he says. Usually, the business community has to come onboard to lobby after bills arrive at the legislature, but that process can be skipped entirely since Chicago

Metropolis speaks as a unified voice and frequently authors the legislation it wants to become law.

Legislators listen to business, as much for self-interest and self-preservation as anything else. This makes for a receptive audience when a member of Chicago Metropolis calls to chat or volunteers to speak at a press conference about a bill. “It’s not another do-gooder group lobbying you; it’s the leadership of a region,” says Wheelan. “Our members can really turn up the heat. And there’s a healthy self-interest on both sides [business and government] that helps.”

Just because the Commercial Club supports legislation that would change the nature of growth, transit and social-service delivery does not mean the entire business community is onboard. Chicago Metropolis 2020 has a board of 40 civic leaders representing business, education and religion, and they continue to conduct “a lot of outreach”—talking to chambers of commerce, civic groups and the media — to expand the number of supporters of the group’s legislation, he says.

The legislature is coming to realize that Chicagoland wins when it competes as a region against other regions. This came into focus when the region successfully lobbied aerospace giant Boeing to relocate, says Wheelan. The region’s cities did not compete against one another, preferring instead to sell the region as a place where the corporation could flourish. What the Commercial Club wants to see happen by the time Chicago Metropolis expires, he adds, is a region well-prepared to compete globally in the 21st century. 🌟



LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Business leaders understand many of the crucial aspects of regionalism. Their own employees may struggle to get to work because of traffic jams or may not be able to live nearby because of high housing costs.
- 2 Business groups are open to persuasion. In addition to the Chicago efforts, business groups in Cleveland, Milwaukee and Silicon Valley have also taken the lead in attempting to influence planning, taxation and regional governance in their regions.
- 3 When convinced of the need, business groups will often pay for the research needed to document the underlying issues of regionalism. Activists should not hesitate to speak to local business leaders in this regard.
- 4 Getting a business group behind legislation makes an enormous difference at the state legislature. Chicago Metropolis 2020 has seen overwhelming support for its bills as they have been introduced. The power of business, along with labor, leaves a huge impression on legislators.
- 5 Business leaders themselves will listen to activists. As noted in the case study on page X, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin found that the friendly support of the statewide Realtors group — an organization that had opposed smart growth and strong planning laws in the past — was critical in building legislative support for the bill.
- 6 Business groups who support regionalism represent only one part of their community. By including educators, religious organizations, unions and others in their planning groups, they will broaden the pool of advocates.
- 7 Business organizations require an agenda to transmit their ideas to the legislature, the press and, just as importantly, to other civic groups such as Junior League and Rotary Club. They need to sell the ideas continually to their base and to their communities.
- 8 Not every business group has the financial wherewithal to start a separate organization such as Chicago Metropolis 2020. But it is a good idea to do so when possible, or to appoint a separate committee with an activist mission of pressuring government officials to change development patterns through new incentives or other means.
- 9 What cannot be accomplished legislatively can be accomplished on other fronts. Developers will listen to businesses that want to see more affordable housing near their corporate campuses. So will community leaders. So will transit planners.
- 10 Expect resistance. Even if the business community agrees on certain principles, local elected officials are extremely reluctant to give up any power. It will take time.
- 11 Activists should encourage business leaders to become visionaries. In recent years they have often been lionized for their large salaries, not for community involvement. This is changing. The press is looking for business leaders who can think beyond the bottom line. If executives — especially those with well-established names nearing the end of their careers — show an interest in regionalism, activists should inquire if they would be willing to serve in a leadership role in bringing change.

CASE STUDY:

AN INTERFAITH COALITION ORGANIZES TO CLEAN UP BROWNFIELDS

In the early 1990s several employers left St. Paul because they couldn't find the land they needed to expand. With city and community leaders reeling from the loss of thousands of jobs, a group of volunteer leaders from several local churches came together to fight for a decidedly difficult cause—raising interest and money for restoring polluted land and preparing it for economic development. Their goal was not just to stop the loss of jobs, but to create new ones as well.

The collection of local congregations, called the St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations (SPEAC), did not start out wanting to rehabilitate “brownfields” around the Twin Cities and the state. (A “brownfield” is a property where expansion, redevelopment or reuse is complicated by the presence or potential presence of contamination.)

SPEAC's odyssey began as a quest to understand urban dynamics and economic development. It appointed Mary Gruber, a registered nurse and leader in her congregation, to serve as chairperson of its Metropolitan Stability task force. Gruber had participated in education issues and other projects in her St. Paul North End neighborhood.

Under Gruber's leadership, SPEAC members interviewed more than 100 government and business leaders on the topic of urban and regional concerns and came away with a resounding message from them — clean up brownfields. Rehabilitating polluted land for jobs and economic development would level the playing field throughout the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota. Neighborhoods could be revitalized. Jobs could be created. Competition between the inner city and the suburbs could be abated.

The group, affiliated with the national, interfaith



Gamaliel Foundation, then exhaustively researched the topic in preparation for what became a long, challenging and ultimately fruitful campaign to pass a statewide brownfields funding law in 1997.

In the early stages the St. Paul-based group found that the first lesson of community organizing is strength in numbers.

Members invited a congregational group in Minneapolis, Interfaith Action, to join their efforts. (After the brownfields campaign, the two groups merged into one organization called “Isaiah.”)

Just as research led them to the issue of brownfields, so would research help bolster their case to legislators. Gruber and her allies spoke to another group of experts to learn how state bonding worked, how much money development agencies required to restore land and what those efforts would involve environmentally. They also learned how many jobs could potentially be created or saved by a brownfield program.

Then, says Gruber, they did a “power analysis” to figure out which legislators would likely carry the issue through the legislature. State Rep. Dee Long of Minneapolis and State Sen. Randy Kelly, now St. Paul's mayor, agreed to

introduce the bill. Meanwhile, organizers and church leaders, numbering in the “hundreds,” met monthly to strategize and make contacts with legislators, representatives of metropolitan and municipal governments and other influential people.

The leaders set up meetings with legislators, editorial boards and agency leaders to present their case. They would congregate a half-hour before a meeting to share notes, talk about what they would emphasize and who would take what roles in the presentation. They would cover what questions they thought would likely come up.

“We always made sure we were on the same page,” Gruber says. “We made sure we let legislators know we knew how the legislature worked while making our case.” And following every meeting, the leaders discussed lessons learned and planned next steps.

Since the effort’s leaders had training in effective leadership in congregational and community organizing, they had a good idea about how to talk to legislators. With more than 70 congregations involved in the organization, Gruber would match leaders with legislators in their districts. A discussion with a legislator from suburban Roseville would invariably involve a resident, or several residents, of his district.

Leaders used maps to show that brownfields and concentrated poverty often went together. They showed, too, that the problem extended beyond the cities and inner-ring suburbs. Republicans from Twin Cities suburbs and from greater Minnesota would often learn, to their surprise, that they represented districts where plenty of land abandoned by industry sat idle. That made the issue less partisan, Gruber says.

In addition to appealing to self-interest, Gruber and her allies were not scared to make the moral argument for cleansing brownfields as well. Volunteers stressed that disadvantaged neighborhoods needed jobs and that people had the right to jobs in their neighborhoods. They saw this as the right thing to do to create better communities. With a constituency of many churches, SPEAC and Interfaith were able to push legislators to see that the idea went beyond environmental and job issues. It became an issue of social justice, too.

Volunteer leaders gave slide shows at churches, led tours of former brownfield sites and even developed skits showcasing the relationship between brownfields, jobs and urban decay.

By the end of three years, nothing had happened, and Gruber was worried. Keeping volunteers interested and

engaged was not difficult in the beginning, but at that point their energy began flagging. Maintaining interest when the legislature was not in session was always difficult, she says, since the motor of political activity slows in those months.

A key turning point in the campaign was when, acting as a catalyst, Isaiah got all of the major local planning and economic development agencies and their state counterparts in one room, along with the legislators who had agreed to author the bill. Gruber chaired the meeting, and every agency had a chance to offer its own suggestions for the bill. The group decided the state’s Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED) would disperse the money.

The bill still faced a few final hurdles. Many rural legislators saw brownfields legislation as another handout to Twin Cities’ communities and were skeptical about investments in inner cities. Gruber and her allies cold-called city managers around the state to encourage them to ask their legislators to support the bill because it would benefit them as well. They agreed, turning rural legislators into supporters.

Bipartisan support greeted the final bill. Although policy language linking brownfields funding with living-wage jobs was killed, the state allocated \$68 million toward brownfield cleanup — a significant legislative win. SPEAC and Interfaith “brought real people to the legislature, and their message, their energy, and their passion was powerful,” said Dee Long, in an interview a few years ago.

Today in the Twin Cities and outstate Minnesota, former brownfields have become business parks, housing developments and retail establishments. In one area of Minneapolis along the Mississippi River, million-dollar townhouses sit on once-polluted land, as does the attractive new Federal Reserve Bank. For SPEAC and Interfaith leaders, the most important piece is the living-wage jobs generated by the light industrial and manufacturing businesses that occupy former brownfields.

Indeed, brownfields have become rich fields. “We turned polluted dirt into pay dirt!” says Gruber. “We got \$68 million over seven years, can you believe that?!”

She notes that, according to DTED documents, the law has helped clean up 1,108 acres of brownfields, retain 2,493 jobs, create 10,160 new living-wage jobs and add 4,000 new housing units. A \$56 million investment, so far, has resulted in \$926 million in private investment and a \$32 million increase in the tax base.

Says Gruber: “That piece of legislation changed the fortunes of several Minnesota cities, and gave many businesses a chance to grow in the cities or to locate new operations in St. Paul and Minneapolis.” 🌟

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Do the research. Know the topic better than the experts.
- 2 Make the linkages clear between concentration of poverty and lack of jobs with regional dispersion of development dollars.
- 3 Cast a wide net for volunteer leaders who come from many municipalities.
- 4 Don't rely on lobbyists to make the case. It's better if it comes from volunteer church leaders.
- 5 Meet with organizers and volunteers before presentations to insure everyone knows his or her role.
- 6 Keep people involved by calling and updating them, even when the legislature is not in session.
- 7 Have a good training program for volunteer leaders.
- 8 Make the environmental argument that cleaning polluted land helps make neighborhoods and cities safer for children and adults. Form coalitions with other groups that see this in their interest, i.e., environmental groups.
- 9 Use your faith to point out the morality of your cause. Religion is a strong element in these debates. Remind legislators that your faith and that of others is a wellspring of strength in their communities.



CASE STUDY:

A WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP SCORES QUICK VICTORY

Convincing a potential adversary to join in the fight for land-use reform may seem as likely a winning strategy as fielding a team of stringers in the World Series. In the cutthroat trenches of state government, why would your chief opponent want to join you in creating a good piece of legislation?

As it turns out, the 1000 Friends of Wisconsin joined forces in 1997 with the state's leading real estate association to push through a land-reform bill in less than a year. Even more surprising was that the legislation, the "Smart Growth for Wisconsin" comprehensive planning law, gained the support of then-Gov. Tommy Thompson, a staunch Republican and current member of the Bush administration.

The law provides competitive grants totaling \$3 million a year to help the state's more than 2,000 communities draft comprehensive plans. These plans must address multiple issues, including land use, transportation, housing and intergovernmental cooperation, and many communities are using them to encourage smart growth and traditional neighborhood design, says Madison Mayor David Cieslewicz, former executive director of 1000 Friends. The law calls for all local governments that make land-use-related decisions to adopt a comprehensive plan by January 1, 2010.

More than a third of the state's towns and cities are writing plans, he says, and each year the program receives more requests than it can grant. "It's the beginning of a new era in Wisconsin where communities will be better planned and have new downtowns and more open space and affordable housing," says Cieslewicz. "Bringing together the business and environmental communities to get this passed made the difference."

Wisconsin's chapter of 1000 Friends opened in Madison in 1997, and a year later Cieslewicz was asked to draft a



comprehensive planning law. The movement began with University of Wisconsin urban planning professor and 1000 Friends board member Brian Ohm, who convened meetings with Realtors, regional planners, state officials and environmentalists to write a definition of comprehensive planning.

After five months the governor agreed to accept the definition, and Cieslewicz began writing the smart growth legislation. The Ohm Group, as it came to be known, largely agreed to the principles before seeing the document, later tweaking it as the law moved through the legislature. The group found a sponsor in Sen. Brian Burke (Democrat-Milwaukee), co-chair of the powerful 16-member Joint Finance Committee, who managed to get the bill passed with the votes of eight Democrats and one Republican in June of 1999.

Despite the governor's endorsement, Republicans in the state assembly almost killed the bill, but swift maneuvering pushed it back into the budget, which gained approval that December. In a little more than a year, Wisconsin created one of the nation's better comprehensive land-use bills, although even advocates say it still lacks all the teeth it needs to significantly change growth patterns in the state's towns and cities.

So why did the Realtors agree to support smart growth legislation? Cieslewicz says it came both out of self-interest and because they saw it as the right thing to do. Although jokingly referred to as governor for life, Thompson planned to leave the post after 16 years and the Realtors had no idea

who would replace him. They figured they'd get a better deal out of a Republican than a Democratic governor. They needed to make friends with Democrats again after a brutal legislative battle in 1998 in which Realtors took the side of Republicans in their failed effort to take over the legislature.

The Realtors in Wisconsin have a long and storied national tradition as a progressive organization, he says. Yet during the early 1990s they had supported some fringe groups that soiled the association's image. "They had been working for quite a while on refashioning their image ... after they had supported legislation by some really scary looking guys in fatigues who were part of the radical property rights lobby," says Cieslewicz. "Those people were not helping their image."

Finally, they saw the merits of the legislation. More than a few developers had had "the rug pulled out from them"

by communities who suddenly changed course on land-use plans or stopped affordable single- and multi-family housing projects. They saw how more predictability would help their business and how pressure to construct more owner-occupied housing worked to their favor — as clients gained more wealth they would come back to the same Realtors to buy up or build bigger.

The Realtors agreed to be the voice of the construction industry and other business-oriented stakeholders before the legislature while serving as the glue that kept the contentious group together in support of the new law. Meanwhile, 1000 Friends spoke as the voice of four environmental groups that supported the legislation, among them the Sierra Club. That everything came together and passed so quickly still amazes Cieslewicz.

"The political culture and timing was just right," he says. 🌟



LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Work across the aisle with associations involved in land-use issues. Even when they're on the conservative side of the issue they are open to persuasion.
- 2 Start small. The 1000 Friends of Wisconsin started out by writing a definition of comprehensive planning. It grew from there. From a definition can follow a law.
- 3 Get supporters together. During the legislative session, 1000 Friends and supporters from business and the environmental movement met every two weeks. Relationships make legislation possible.
- 4 Find a legislative champion, the more powerful the better. A handful of legislators, supported and prodded by a strong lobby, can move legislation quickly.
- 5 Get the governor on your side. Then Gov. Tommy Thompson saw how the state could save money, look more inviting and have a competitive edge with smarter growth. Republicans have supported similar legislation elsewhere. They understand the need for comprehensive planning — sometimes.
- 6 Pick a group or two to serve as the leading spokespersons. The Wisconsin Realtors Association spoke for the business community, 1000 Friends spoke for environmentalists representing several organizations. Don't confuse the message with too many messengers.
- 7 Mobilize supporters when the time comes to put the heat on legislators to pass laws supporting initiatives dealing with regionalism. Winners show up.





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