

# Why Local Communities Block Regional Viewpoint

By DENNIS PAJOT

"We have to get around, to a certain extent, the power of local government to block if we want to make changes in the

trends of regional development."

Irving J. Rubin, director of the Detroit Regional Transportation and Land Use Study (TALUS), thus summarized his opinion of what is needed to implement a "1990 Plan."

The result of more than four years work by TALUS, the 1990 plan would modify some existing trends. It is currently being reviewed for possible adoption by officials of this six-county region.

HIS COMMENT didn't surprise editors at Observer Newspapers gathered to hear him answer: "What do you expect from local communities in implementation of this plan?"

Earlier in the briefing he had

stated, "Local interests result in negative rather than positive effects, unless something in such plans is directly beneficial to that local community."

He was even more specific later. "Reliance on the property tax is the single most important barrier to implementing significant change on a regional level," said Rubin.

This is so for two reasons, he offered.

First, local communities are hard pressed to finance their traditional services -- garbage disposal, police, fire and education -- from what tax base there is in that community at present.

Second, "The tax base of the metro area does not add up to the kind of money needed to implement the plan."

RUBIN, WHO unqualifiedly said he is an advocate of a regional government with enough power to overcome parochial jealousies, suggested greater use of income taxation and then partial restriction of local zoning powers to make possible regional planning.

Once it becomes unnecessary to keep an eye on tax base in zoning decisions, it will be possible to zone with an eye to better community living, he believes.

State legislation, which he also advocated, could then modify present local zoning powers to require that each community have certain ratios of industry, business, multiple dwellings, single homes, and, within the single homes category, a full range of cost ranges.

"Most communities presently zone for clean, neat, non-smoke-producing industry; to attract middle and upper class white folks and exclude poor people and black people," said Rubin.

"As long as the local tax base determines the zoning game, that's the way it'll be."

DOES HE believe in elimination of traditional local community self-determination?

"Isn't a matter of eliminating local control," said Rubin.

"It's a matter of providing decent levels of living for everyone and then providing for opportunity for local supplementation."

"It would eliminate a perception of local control which is largely illusory anyway," he said.

"It's an overriding obligation which society has within the metro region."

He likened his proposal to "something like a radical approach" comparable to Gov. William Milliken's education reform plan if broached years ago.

WHILE LOCAL interests currently work against regional projects, in Rubin's view, he sees just about every other force as being beneficial to regionalism.

Highest on his list of favorable influences is the federal government's power to pour in funds in large doses -- and to require certain criteria from lower levels for doing so.

State government, with its growing funding power, is also helpful in Rubin's view. He cited authority of the broad-scope state departments of highways, natural resources and water resources as being helpful because of benefits to their goals, which have little to do with local boundary lines.

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—Irving J. Rubin

County government can help with money (again) but most importantly because of its powers of land acquisition.

Next he ranked the Detroit Water Board, which has representatives of suburban communities and cross-boundary interests.

"Major land developers" and "big auto companies" were rated well ahead of local governments as helpful by Rubin.

SEMMCO stands for the Southeastern Michigan Council of

WHAT'S LACKING? he was asked.



IRVING J. RUBIN, director of TALUS

Governments. It functions as an association of member local governing bodies that pay dues and delegate a member to attend SEMCO general assembly meetings and elect the SEMCO board, officers and committees.

None of these delegates are directly elected by the people to represent regional interests. They're selected by the local school boards, city councils, township boards and county boards.

Rubin hinted that such delegates can be more concerned with protecting and furthering needs of their own level, for which they were specifically elected at the polls.

"Maybe what's needed is regional elections," suggested Rubin, "without giving SEMCO any more authority than it already has."

He emphasized his point by saying that as at least one occasion, a SEMCO decision affecting a local unit of government was countermanded by a telephone call to Washington.

"Everybody can call his congressman," said Rubin.

SEMMCO'S POWERS of endorsement or non-endorsement of its own or member units' requests for U.S. aid are weak in the face of such authority.

"There is a need for a regional approach," said Rubin. "If we're really serious about implementation, we have to get into the question of what motivates."

Here he suggested that funding -- "taxation" in government business -- is what motivates.

"It's growingly apparent there's a need for federal, state and local legislation," said Rubin.

"Getting rid of excessive reliance on the property tax and going to income tax would have much to do with implementing a rational plan for development of this region."

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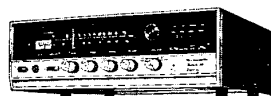
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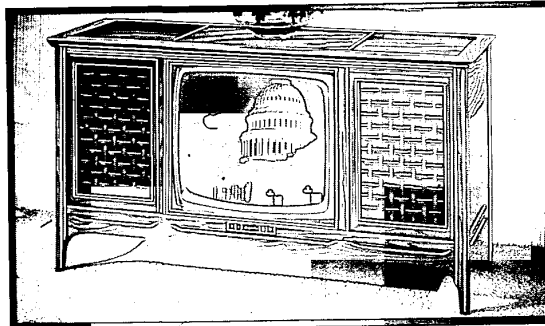


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