AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
http://ageconsearch.umn.edu
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

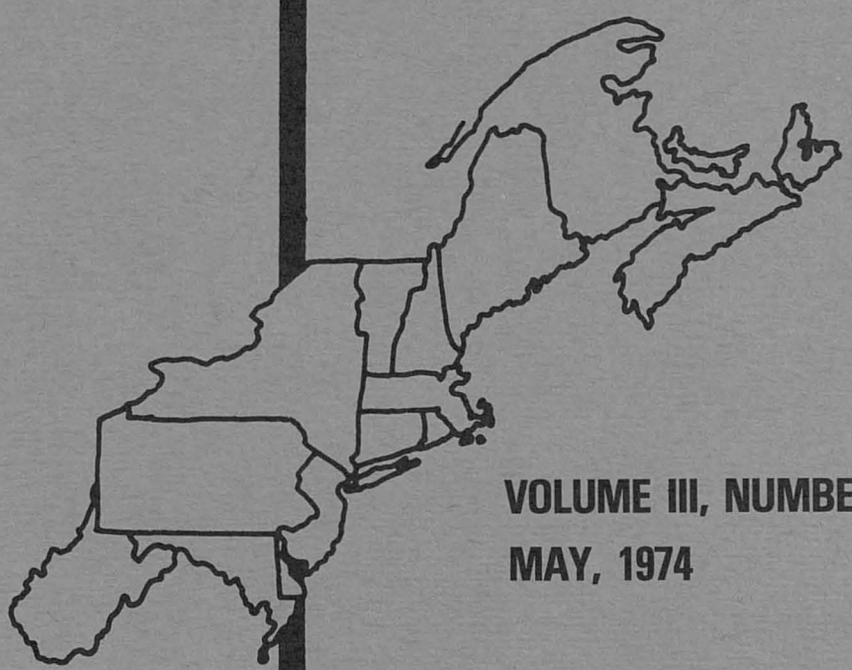
PER. SHELF

GIANNINI FOUNDATION OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS LIBRARY

JUN 26 1974

JOURNAL OF THE

Northeastern Agricultural Economics Council



VOLUME III, NUMBER I

MAY, 1974

"QEP"--A NEW METHOD OF RURAL PLANNING

Frederic O. Sargent
Resource Economist
Department of Resource Economics
The University of Vermont

Since its emergence in the early part of this century, planning in the United States has been predominantly urban. Regional planning of watersheds, has received some attention but planning for rural areas has not been widely practiced, nor has it been taught in planning schools. Support for this generalization may be found in planning texts which consider 50,000 population a "small" municipality. Further evidence is found in town plans prepared through support of federal "701" funds during the past decade. These plans are usually for expansion of urban facilities and services and ignore exclusively rural land uses. Planning in England presents a contrast. It is appropriately referred to as "town and country planning" as it covers the range of land use intensities from agricultural to the highest value urban block as interrelated and interconnected parts of a single fabric.

The reason for the urban focus of United States planning is easy to find. Since the beginning of systematic urban planning in the United States in the early decades of this century, only cities have employed planners and done planning. A partial exception was U.S. Department of Agriculture sponsored land use planning in the 1930's and early 1940's and federally sponsored river basin planning. The USDA land use planning was an interesting but fruitless exercise. It was educational for participants but led to no significant implementation as it was not conducted by government units with authority to implement. It was abruptly terminated with the advent of World War II. Federal river basin planning was climaxed by the Tennessee Valley Authority which was recognized as a successful project. It was copied throughout the world but not repeated in the United States.

The academic community has maintained an interest in the theory of regional planning and has exchanged views in the Journal of the Regional Planning Association. Planning schools are now paying more attention to the regional unit and its rural periphery. Ian McHarg, the planning genius of the 1960's, has put planning on a natural region basis and raised it to the level of a scientific, artistic, and multiple discipline process.

A new method of rural planning designed specifically for rural New England has been developed through a research program at the University of Vermont. This approach, called Quality Environment Planning or "QEP,"

incorporates McHarg's planning with nature, adds planning with man, and applies it to towns of 10,000 and under (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1
Summary of Plans Prepared in QEP Research Program

Town	Date completed	Number of assisting agencies	Population	Number of pages	Number of maps
South Burlington, Vt.	1969	5	10,032	127	25
West Fairlee, Vt.	1971	7	337	37	10
Ferrisburg, Vt.	1972	3	1,875	53	8
Peterborough, N.H.	1972	7	4,000	45	7
Essex, Vt.	1973	6	10,951	109	18
Shrewsbury, Vt.	1973	6	570	41	9
Underhill, Vt.	1973	7	1,198	40	7
Shelburne, Vt.	1973	5	3,728	87	13

Table 2
QEP Plans in Process

Town	Anticipated completion date	Population
South Burlington, Vt.	March 1974	10,032
Colchester, Vt.	May 1974	8,776
Charlotte, Vt.	June 1974	1,802
Chittenden, Vt.	May 1974	646
Stockbridge, Mass.	May 1974	2,200

QEP evolved from a number of sources. The taproot was the planning for the cutover areas of Wisconsin and other lake states before World War II. In this effort the aridity of urban planning concepts was recognized and the development of rural planning principles commenced. The USDA land use planning program, also of the pre-World War II period, laid the foundation for systemizing rural land use problems, developed land use classes, considered several types of solutions, and showed the need for relating planning to a political unit that can implement it. The Soil Conservation Service of the USDA contributed a concept of a watershed political unit to support watershed rural land use planning and

developed soil analysis for planning purposes. Academically, the social science subdiscipline of land economics developed at Wisconsin in the 1920's spread throughout the midwest and west, and further developed rural planning techniques.

G. Angus Hills of the Forest Research Center in Maple, Ontario, requires special mention. He developed an ingenious system for classifying rural land for planning purposes. It covered agriculture, forestry, wildlife, recreation, and wetlands. His classic "Glackmeyer Land Use Report" demonstrated the use and efficiency of his system.1/ His pioneering work should not be forgotten because he was a decade ahead of society's recognition of the necessity for scientific land classification.

QEP is the opposite of textbook, urban planning methods. In urban planning the student is trained to project population growth, jobs needed, industrial and commercial growth, and then plan land use to satisfy these needs. Any land left over, is colored green and labeled "open space." This area may include cemeteries and other "waste " land. In QEP the opposite approach is used. The student is trained to classify and evaluate land for agriculture, extensive recreation, wildlife, soil and water conservation, natural areas, wetlands (previously called waste land), and aesthetics. Land left over is portioned out to intensive uses--residential, commerce, and industry. This does not slight intensive uses but concentrates them in areas best suited and prevents string and scattered development.

QEP is not comprehensive, rather it is a basis on which the comprehensive plan can be built. Planning for intensive land uses, urban facilities, transportation network, etc., supplements the QEP. Together they constitute a "comprehensive" plan.

QEP is not an antigrowth methodology. It is a method for accommodating growth on the basis of land suitabilities and capacities with priorities designed to protect natural cycles. Instead of putting oil tanks on the lakeshore for the convenience of barge captains, the lakeshore is reserved for recreation for the populace, and tank farms are put in another area with an attached pipeline. Instead of draining a marsh, it is evaluated as a flood reduction sponge and wildlife habitat. Growth is a goal but it is secondary to environmental protection. Accommodating growth for the oil company must be meshed with providing a public access to public waters for the whole public. Residential growth is not permitted to be at the expense of a wetland wildlife habitat. QEP differs from urban planning in four major ways: (1) in nature and source of planning goals, (2) in organization and procedure, (3) in planning concepts, and (4) in relevance to rural towns.

1/ "The Glackmeyer Report of Multiple Land-Use Planning" by G. A. Hills and A. N. Boissonneau, Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, 1960.

Planning Goals

In conventional planning, certain goals were tacitly assumed: (a) that growth is inevitable and desirable, (b) that increasing the tax base is a prime desiderata, and (c) that the authorities concerning public planning goals are planners and top municipal administrators. A major innovation of QEP is a new goal determination procedure--the people are asked what they want! In eight pilot projects in which 100 percent attitude surveys were made, a number of previously unknown public goals were discovered. It was discovered that people do not object to having their taxes raised to provide public recreation facilities. All roads do not have to be straightened, leveled, widened, and tree-nuded. Public access to public land and waters was found to be a top priority goal.

QEP is based on an assumption which becomes accepted as a public goal as a result of the planning process--that if the quality of the environment is maintained, then land values will increase, and the greatest economic (most profitable) use of the land as well as an attractive way of life can be developed.

The QEP planning process incorporates a discussion of public goals and an educational effort to convince people that public goals are generally attainable. As a result, new town goals begin to appear. People start to look at their town as their environment and start to think how they want it to look and be for their children.

Organization and Procedures

The most productive innovation of QEP is assembling a planning team of experts on the public payroll from six or more disciplines. The experts are drawn from state and federal agencies and the state university, plus a few from special interest organizations--Audubon Society, Fish and Game Club, Chamber of Commerce, etc. The disciplines and fields usually included are: economics, soil science, geology, wildlife biology, forestry, planning, recreation, and hydrology. These experts, who are also citizens, are invited to work together as a team with the special town planning committee and environmental planner to develop a QEP. The experts invariably agree to help as: (1) they are usually specifically authorized by their agency to assist the public, and (2) they are happy to make their talents available to their neighbors and to contribute to improving their own environment. The result is a team of experts that few consulting firms could match. This is available at no new cost to the taxpayer.2/

2/ The cost of QEP is small no matter how the cost is calculated. Three graduate students who conducted QEP's spent 200 hours on each project. Additional costs are estimated at 10 professional man days. The present practice is to charge towns up to $750 to defray costs of the attitude survey, publication of the final plan, and mileage for town surveys.

Opposition to the expert team procedure comes largely from political and self-image oriented government agencies that are headed by directors who fail to understand the complexities of planning, and are reluctant to essay new practices. Agencies whose prime concern is their own image and political survival are of little help on a QEP team.

Another organizational innovation is the town QEP committee. Town planning commissions are usually very busy with conventional planning work and, therefore, are not best suited for an active, intensive town survey and a new planning program. It is, therefore, necessary to require the planning commission to appoint a special subcommittee to work with the quality environment planner and expert team. This group should include interested, self-volunteered citizens with a clear interest in environmental protection. Without a new committee the planner has too heavy a burden of inertia to overcome. It is important that the QEP committee be a subcommittee of the planning commission and include one member from the planning commission to assure liaison and prevent the commission from feeling that their prerogatives are threatened. The plan will then flow directly to the planning commission for approval in accordance with prescribed legal procedure.

A third major procedural innovation is open planning. This is an intensive program to involve as many citizens as possible in the planning decision-making process. Please note--this is not an information campaign to educate the electorate about the plan being made for them. It is an effort to involve citizens in planning decision making. The method consists of holding workshops, speaking at organization meetings, conducting field trips, and using each occasion to systematically elicit from those present their responses to alternatives for access, development, and protection; and their recommendations concerning priorities. It is the goal of open planning to develop a plan in the minds of people, as well as on paper and so to enhance the prospects of the plan being implemented.

Planning Concepts

To make planning relevant to rural towns, new planning concepts as well as new definitions of old concepts are required. The new or renewed concepts developed and utilized in the QEP planning projects concern: (1) aesthetic planning, (2) natural area protection, (3) wildlife habitat protection, (4) conservation planning, (5) extensive recreation facilities, and (6) public access to public waters.

Aesthetic planning is a conceptual and functional breakthrough. "You can't plan aesthetics"--people say--"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." The experience of the pilot projects is to the contrary. There is sufficient general agreement concerning aesthetic value judgments to make aesthetics the least controversial chapter in a plan. Everyone (or 90-odd percent) agrees that an auto graveyard is ugly; that trees, grass, flowers, and flowering shrubs are attractive; that views of the lake and mountains are beautiful; and that signs are nonlovely. Based on this consensus, a chapter on aesthetics may incorporate all the

details necessary to promote beauty and subdue ugliness in town planning. The subjects covered include a landscaped beauty zone or setback in commercial zones, scenic overlooks and turnouts, scenic picnic areas, strict sign control, arboreal buffer zone requirements, tree-cutting controls, a tree-planting program, a town common proposal, and architectural controls. In the pilot projects recommendations for these amenities were readily understood and accepted.

Protection of natural areas as a major focus of planning is relatively new. One of the first natural area reports prepared exclusively for planning was "Natural Areas in Vermont," by Professor Hubert Vogelmann, 1964. One of the first rural town plans to include a chapter on natural areas was "Proposed Natural Resource Plan, West Fairlee, 1971."

A natural area is any area that natural scientists or town planners say should be protected and maintained in its natural state for present and future education and/or enjoyment. The definition is necessarily vague, as each area is unique. Natural areas include: caves, waterfalls, virgin stands, unusual species, undisturbed ecosystems, or unusual or representative and prized natural phenomena. In planning, both the scientific and the popular definition should be employed. If the people of X Town say a bog is a natural area, then it is a natural area for X Town's planning purposes even if a botanist says it is a poor specimen. If a geologist says a rock outcropping is a natural area, as it is the best example found in the region, then it should be so indicated in the plan even if local citizens ignore it. One of the best examples of citizen committee identification of natural areas is found in the Shrewsbury Environment Plan (1973).

Rural citizens readily appreciate the significance of wildlife habitats and the reasons for protecting them. This is an exclusive rural planning concept as wildlife cannot exist naturally in an urban environment. Wildlife habitats are identified, located, and evaluated by the town conservation committee with help from state and university wildlife biologists. Protection of wildlife habitats is possible or facilitated when the habitats are unsuitable for development because of soil conditions or topography. Wildlife protection is a valuable planning concept as the nature and number of wildlife is a good indicator of the extent and intensity of man's occupation and depredations. The QEP's for Shrewsbury and Chittenden provide good examples of plans for wildlife habitat protection. Both plans identify and protect all deer wintering yards.

Conservation planning is also understandable and acceptable to rural town officials and residents. It consists of identifying and zoning areas which should not be disturbed or built upon in order to protect water quality and prevent soil erosion. These areas include: steep slopes, streambanks, drainageways, floodplains, lakeshores, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, and high elevations. Protection of these areas can best be accomplished by use of a conservation zone. This type

of zone, when applied to areas unsuitable for development, does not deprive rural landowners of any rights inherent in their land. In fact, it may enhance land values by guaranteeing wise land use in the area. Knowledgeable landowners understand this possibility.

Provision for extensive recreation is an indispenable component of QEP. Anyone who grew up in rural U.S. remembers that one could go anywhere in town to hunt, fish, study nature, collect, think, hike, walk, climb, ski, or sit. If he came across a "no trespassing" sign he knew it meant "city folk"--it didn't mean him--he lived there! This freedom of individual movement out of doors is fast being lost as rural areas are suffering creeping urbanization. With the advent of the superhighways, urbanizing changes are taking place in all rural areas. This change has progressed to the point that much of the formerly functional open countryside is now locked up in private ownership. To counter this trend and to recapture the social value of free movement of citizens out of doors, it is necessary to address this subject directly in the town plan. The solution is a pedestrian trail network. The pedestrian trail can utilize conservation zones--running along streams, lakeshores, and high elevations. It can be designed to provide access to natural areas or to bypass them when maximum protection is needed. It can be obtained without cost through agreements with landowners and by making a trail easement a condition for approval of a development. This concept has been presented and readily accepted in all towns in the QEP research project series. South Burlington has already made considerable progress in implementing a pedestrian trail system. Essex and Shelburne are well advanced. A pedestrian trail network will contribute as much toward producing a quality environment as anything except public access to public waters.

Public access to public waters is another new concept that catches on quickly. At the start of a QEP program the typical situation is for a town with 1 to 18 miles of frontage on public waters to have no, or only minimal (i.e., 1 acre), public access. A year later, after the QEP planning program has influenced attitudes, the typical situation is a general understanding that public waters are indeed owned by the public, that the public has a right to multipurpose access and that acquisition is economically feasible. A plan for significant public access will have been developed, and an active campaign may be underway to get more access at once without waiting to complete the plan.

Relevance to Rural Towns

In eight pilot projects we learned that QEP is not only specifically relevant for rural towns but that it also meshes well with conventional planning. After the first QEP pilot project was completed in South Burlington, many skeptics argued that the process could be conducted in an urbanizing town of 10,000 near the university, but would be inappropriate in a small, rural Vermont town. That concern was tested and found groundless when a QEP was developed in West Fairlee--population 337.

QEP requires a relatively high level of planning sophistication on the part of town officials--but cities of 10,000 and above have no monopoly of this quality, and many rural towns have strong leadership.

Some critics of QEP say the approach is value loaded and biased. Nothing could be closer to the truth. QEP rests on two value premises. It assumes that the top values are protection of the environment and that economic development and growth should be guided within the framework established by first considering the carrying capacity of the environment. Conventional urban planning is also biased, but in an opposite direction.

A limiting factor in expanding QEP to a general program is the low level of interagency cooperation. Many administrators of state and federal agencies have possessive attitudes toward their responsibilities and are not ready to share them with others. The most necessary step to develop QEP into a general planning program is to hold training sessions for administrators of state and federal agencies to help them understand interagency cooperation so the agency experts can work as a team under a chief environmental planner.3/

Eight case studies do not prove with statistical reliability that the procedure of QEP will be a success wherever attempted--nor exhaust the number of innovations possible. Additional new planning methods are being developed and tested in the five QEP projects now in process. Methods for keeping agricultural land in agriculture are being refined and planned growth policies are being incorporated into town plans.4/

However, the eight completed case studies do lead to a number of tentative conclusions sufficiently reliable to use as a basis for revising town planning procedures. The major conclusions of this research project are the following:

1. Quality Environment Planning is a distinctive and separate approach to rural land use planning. It is based on new planning concepts and it supplements conventional urban planning techniques, and it does protect environmental values.

3/ For a detailed description of the QEP process, see "Guidelines for Quality Environmental Planning," by F. O. Sargent, Pamphlet #38, Vt. Ext. Ser., 1973.

4/ See "Alternative Methods for Keeping Land in Agriculture," by F. O. Sargent, Journal of the Northeast Agricultural Economics Council Proceedings, 1973. Also, see "Farmland Assessment in Vermont," by G. J. Kirchner and F. O. Sargent, mimeo, February 1974.

2. In nearly every case, Quality Environment Planning has lead to significantly new understandings of planning by the people and to dramatic results.5/

3. QEP is a precise procedure with well-established concepts, steps, timetable, sources, and methods. It should be considered carefully for support by all state and federal agencies and university groups interested in teaching or extension to improve community life.

4. QEP could be developed into a general program by public service agencies without any new appropriation of funds. It would only be necessary to train one public servant in each county in the special procedures of QEP, to provide administrative support, and to plan work priorities to permit all contributing agencies and departments to cooperate on the agency natural resource technical teams.

5/ An example of a dramatic action directly resulting from a QEP is provided by the first project in South Burlington, where a 100-acre park on Lake Champlain was acquired by a town that was previously landlocked.