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POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE STYLES OF LOCAL

GOVERNMENTS IN NONMETRO AREAS

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IN NONMETRO AREAS *

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All major forms of local government are found in nonmetropolitan areas of the United States, including counties, municipalities, townships and towns,and school districts.Even some of the more esoteric forms -- such as economic development districts and regional planning agencies -- are well represented in nonmetro regions, although innovation in governmental purpose and structure is a characteristic more common to metropolitan areas.

The nonmetro local units are a diverse lot in relative complexity of organization and scope of functions. There are major differences in the expenditure and employment levels of the three types of general-purpose governments -- counties, municipalities, and townships -- even when pop- ulation is held constant. At one end of the range, most midwestern town- ships operate frugally much as they did in the 19th Century, with few if any full-time officers and employees and with limited responsibilities -- perhaps maintaining a few miles of gravel road and a public cemetery, rudimentary form of poor relief, and assessing property for tax purposes. At the other end are a number of rural county governments and some small municipalities with full-time professional executives backed up by EDP systems and carrying out numerous and varied activities, including recreation, mental and physical health protection, and land-use and environmental regulation.

Still it is possible to generalize in a meaningful way about some of the more informal aspects of nonmetro governments, particularly since the great majority of such units operate in rural or small urban communities. The elected and appointed officials who staff these governments are very much products of their communities, and are sensitive to local values and expectations. Local government is expected to be simple, informal, and accessible. What does this mean for performance, for the day-to-day behavior of policy makers and administrators?

This paper is an inventory and description of the styles of policy making and administration characteristic of small-community governments. Based on a highly impressionistic literature dominated by case studies, and on my own observations of small-town government and politics in two Midwestern states and California, this discussion offers a hypothetical framework.

Policy Styles of Governing Boards

Policy making in nonmetropolitan governments is essentially a function of elected governing boards -- city and village councils, town and township boards, county commissions or boards of supervisors, etc. Generally absent in the small communities are elected strong executives,[1] such as big city mayors and metropolitan county presidents, who combine political and policy leadership with control over administrative resources.

A foremost trait of these governing boards is their sensitivity to the fragile political environments of their communities. Small towns and rural locales, particularly communities which are relatively homogeneous and closely-knit, have a low tolerance for major conflict over public policy. When people know one another very well and in a large variety of social contexts, they are not inclined to engage in open and serious political disagreement. They are limited by a fear that such disagreement can lead to personal animosities which cannot easily be healed.

Governing boards carry out the general goal of avoiding serious political conflict by maintaining decision styles that emphasize consensus. This involves four interrelated patterns:

> -- A commitment to unanimity at virtually any cost;
> -- Adherence to the status quo;
> -- Emphasis on personal and informal government;
> -- Limited policy specialization.

Taken together these patterns suggest that county supervisors, township trustees, small city and village councilmen, and members of other nonmetro governing boards handle public problems so as to minimize their importance and intensity.

Unanimity and the Status Quo

Elected governing board members readily accept the need to maintain a collective unanimity at all costs. This is necessary to present a united front to the community at large and to keep harmony among themselves.

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[1] Many administrative officers are elected in nonmetro areas, including city clerks and treasurers; township supervisors, assessors, and road commissioners; and prosecuting attorneys, clerks, recorders, treasurers, sheriffs, and a variety of other county officials. These officeholders generally lack comprehensive policy powers, and operate in limited ministerial roles.

Governing boards in some rural communities operate for years without openly displaying disagreement. At their public meetings members rarely take issue with one another; motions are passed almost automatically by simultaneous head-nodding or by a joint "aye," and when formal roll-calls are required -- usually for legal reasons -- they are recorded without dissenting votes. The continual display of unanimity comes easily when the members of a board all share basic political values and together reflect the social and cultural homogeneity of their community. But even when there are personal differences over substantive issues, they are voluntarily hidden for sake of presenting a unified appearance to the community.

The preservation of unanimity is inseparable from an adherence to the status quo. Keeping to the routine and familiar is the safest course for boards which want to retain their unanimity at all costs; to raise new issues for public consideration is to open up the decision process for possible disagreement and confusion. Under this belief, local governments limit their activities and governing boards rarely innovate. Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman call this a "minimization of decision making" -- the tendency of a rural government to assume far fewer responsibilities and functions than it is legally empowered to conduct. (Vidich and Bensman, 1958, pp. 114-155). As long as the pattern of routine and minimal activity is unchallenged in the small community, the decision process is stable and effortless.

The foremost threat to the status quo, and to the equanimity of governing boards, comes when demands are made for expanding the scope of government -- for creating new programs or policies, extending existing operations, or otherwise increasing public expenditures and revenues. If brought to the point where they are serious proposals for community and board consideration, such demands are seen as leading to the expression of differing views. They raise the level of community conflict and undermine board unanimity. Board members are not enthusiastic about confronting these demands. They lack confidence in their personal competence to deal with new legal and administrative questions. They are annoyed at the complexities which are raised, at the expenditures of personal time and energy required. Certainly board members are not likely to rock the boat themselves; they see their task as preventing the proposals made by others in the community from absorbing too much public attention and requiring forthright decisions.

To maintain unanimity and protect the status quo, governing boards use a variety of techniques. Some -- more implicit than explicit -- are inherent in the normal behavior of rural board members at their regular meetings. The deliberative process at these sessions is marked by what appears to be aimless and leisurely discussion. If formal agendas are prepared they are not closely followed, with the exception of recurring items such as clerk's and treasurer's reports, minutes of the last meeting, and routine bills presented for approval. The items with possible controversial content -- including personnel problems and constituency demands -- are approached indirectly with a great deal of random talk. No board member seems to want to come to a point, nobody pushes hard for a specific solution and a quick resolution to the issue.

In fact, as I have observed in midwestern township meetings, issues may not be brought up at the meeting according to a one-by-one order; the discussion of one matter is intertwined with the discussion of another, as well as with general conversation about farming and neighborhood events (Sokolow, 1968, p. 42). There is a definite purpose in such unfocused deliberations, as Vidich and Bensman find in their description of board meetings in Springdale, an upstate New York village:

> This discussion, which appears so strange to the outsider, takes place for the purpose of finding a common ground on which all can agree and in which no opinion stands out. In this way no member irrevocably commits himself on an issue and, hence, does not alienate himself from the other members of the board with whom he must deal from month to month and in his daily living on a 'friendly' basis. (Vidich and Bensman, 1958, p. 130.)

The technique of talking around an issue is a means of resolving it while avoiding an open display of conflict. Sometimes this requires extensive consultations among board members and other affected parties outside the formal meetings, where disagreements can be exposed and settled in private.

Other, more explicit techniques are directed to suppressing demands for change before they advance to the stage of formal consideration and prove embarrassing to board members. A demand may be regularly put off by delaying its consideration. Board members hope that proponents will grow weary of postponement and that the issue will eventually die for lack of interest. If the delays are long enough, the hope goes, outside events may resolve the problem without requiring board action. Time is the technique; indefinite delay avoids a direct confrontation of the issue thus increasing the probability that the potential for conflict can be reduced and ultimately eliminated.

Demands for change can also be frustrated through the scheduling and conduct of meetings. Governing boards often meet at hours which are inconvenient for a majority of citizens. Citizen participation is discouraged by the physical arrangements of public meeting rooms, including limited audience seating and a barrier between the audience and the rostrom or table where the officeholders sit. And while formal agendas usually allot time for public questions and comments, this can be put off until late in the meeting if governing board members anticipate that controversial issues are to be broached. The strategy at evening sessions may be to stretch out a crowded agenda -- through prolonged discussion -- into the early morning hours, with the aim of chasing the audience home before they can raise the disagreeable issues.

If proponents for change are persistent despite these frustrations, board members may counter with a series of "put downs." One is humor, to meet serious ideas with jokes and flippancy and perhaps to confuse the proposals with the personal idiosyncracies of their proponents which may be well-known in the community. Another is silence, a long and awkward pause

by the board also calculated to unbalance serious intentions. And any number of arguments why a new program or revised policy cannot be considered are easily mustered by board members -- "we lack jurisdiction (it properly belongs with another agency)", there is "no precedence," and "it costs too much."

The ability to apply these techniques, and head off issues before they become serious controversies, rests on the commitment of all members of a governing board to unanimity and the status quo. For some boards this means acceptance by the members of a set of "rules of the game" -- unwritten but very real laws that limit and guide their interaction as public decision makers. The rules are expectations held by each member that his colleagues will treat him fairly and openly, and that he will do the same. Most rules constitute a form of "legislative courtesy," in which members do not publicly oppose each other, do not support each other's political opponents or enemies, and support each other as much as possible. Competition and disagreement may be discouraged by an implicit principle that available rewards are to be shared among all board members. In a rural Illinois county the eight county board supervisors act on this principle by taking turns in serving as chairman and in heading the most desirable board committees. They also share somewhat equally for their separate townships the annual expenditures for local road and bridge construction, which are the major constituency benefits of county government. (Sokolow, 1964).

Personal Government

The face-to-face character of small-community politics adds further a personal dimension to the local decision process. Governing boards are guided in their decisions by particularistic rather than universalistic values. Their judgments are made according to such subjective and personal standards as kinship, friendship, and locality rather than the more objective and impersonal standards of general principles and written law. Robert Wood sees this as a means of bringing government into line with community mores:

> Legal and procedural requirements are overlooked and ignored. They are always to be adjusted to the 'common sense, down-to-earth judgment' of the participants to take account of unique conditions and provincial peculiarities. (Wood, 1958, p. 278)

This is illustrated by Phillip Foss' account of how a local advisory board in Oregon administers the program of private grazing on federal range lands. In granting grazing permits to ranchers, the board members are guided by their personal knowledge of the personality and influence of individual applicants rather than the more universalistic provisions of the grazing code. They pay little attention to the facts and hard information provided by the federal range managers, but tend to rely on past decisions and their feel for the situation (Foss, 1960, pp. 115-116).

This emphasis on personal and informal government suggests that small-town policy makers are highly accessible to their constituents. Yet accessibility does not necessarily imply responsiveness-- as the earlier comments about resisting demands for policy change indicate. Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of nonmetro policy makers is this combination of openness and stubbornness.

Limited Specialization

One consequence of personal government is a limited specialization in the public decision processes. Where informality and face-to-face relations mark the operations of local government, different governmental functions are not sharply separated. In particular, legislative and administrative functions are intermingled; the theoretical division-of-labor between deciding public policy and carrying it out breaks down in the small community.

Governing boards in this setting rarely confine their work to the deliberation and establishment of general policies. In fact, they seem to spend most of their decision making energies on the administrative details of everyday government. Wilder Crane describes a Wisconsin county board of supervisors which thrashes out at considerable length the weighty matter of Saturday hours for the courthouse but passes with almost no examination the annual highway budget which is the county's largest expenditure. (Crane, 1956). At a monthly meeting of a rural Michigan township board, the major actions taken concerned the price of cemetery lots, parts for the township power mower and cemetery well, replacement of wooden voting booths, the problem of a stopped-up toilet, and the review of accounts payable. A portion of the meeting was adjourned and reconvened on the grounds of the township's cemetery, as board members gathered first-hand information on some of the matters before them. More than discussion was involved; individual board members themselves took on the job of repairing the power mower and cemetery well. (Sokolow, 1968, p. 44).

This attention to non-legislative responsibilities, in large part, is forced upon the governing board in the small community because of the minimal administrative apparatus of local government. In the smallest of governments, elected decision matters may have to deal personally with a physical plant problem because they have few if any employees to assign to the job, let alone a full-time professional administrator to make the non-policy decisions. There are also statutory reasons for the intermingling of functions; township supervisors in many midwestern states, for example, are legally given overlapping responsibilities as both legislators (chairmen of township boards) and administrators (chief executive of township government, assessor, etc.).

But for an individual board member in the rural community there can be a more compelling reason for using a plumber's snake to unplug the clogged

lines in the public restroom. It is a direct act that helps to fulfill
his responsibility to the public as an elected decision maker. By concentrating
on the familiar and the routine, he has the personal assurance of doing his job
without having to deal with the more complicated policy problems that
threaten unanimity and the status quo. In fact if the major issues are
effectively suppressed before they take up much public attention, a
governing board may have little to do other than tending to administrative
details. As a result the board members have considerable expertise about
a large number of minor matters without acquiring much information about
policy alternatives on major problems.

The lack of specialization goes father than a blurring of the dis-
tinction between policy making and administration. Because of the emphasis
on personal and informal government, political and non-political processes
are easily intermingled in the small community. Granville Hicks points to
this in the first chapter of his autobiographical account of an intellectual's
settlement in a New England community. Hicks -- a school trustee and fire
commissioner -- describes his activities during a typical week. A trip to
the village store for a Sunday paper results in the exchange of comments about
a recent political error of the town's Republican chairman. Hicks talks to
several persons leaving church about library and school affairs, and in
a visit to a second store he discusses the tax rolls with the storekeeper
who is the school tax collector. Stopping at his neighbors for a social
visit, the talk turns to local political events. Later in the week, as
school trustee, Hicks delivers a salary check to the school janitor, who,
as a member of the board of assessments, brings up the author's property
valuation (Hicks, 1947, ch. 1).

Politics and government in this rural community -- as in many others --
is not specialized activity, confined to particular times and surroundings.
Rather the political functions of the community are transacted within the
web of everyday, non-political, personal relations.

Administrative Styles

Personal and informal styles also characterize the administrative side
of local government in nonmetro settings. These styles are enhanced by the
relatively small size and simple organization of such governments, and by
how public employees obtain and keep their jobs.

Small-community governments employ relatively large numbers of workers
on a per-capita basis (Stocker, 1977). But as individual governments,
they are tiny bureaucracies.   In 1972 the payrolls
of units under 10,000 population averaged 32 employees for municipalities,
1 for midwestern townships, 15 for New England and mid-Atlantic towns and
townships, and 62 for counties. These averages were for full-time equivalents.
Most employees in the smallest units (under 5,000 for municipalities and

New England towns, and all midwestern townships) were part-time workers
(1972 Census of Governments).

With small bureaucracies, the nonmetro governments lack elaborate
hierachies   of supervision or schemes of specialization. The formal
distance between the lowest employee and highest administrator
is minimal. Departmental organization is sometimes missing and the few
employees may report directly to the governing board. Municipalities above
2,500 population with a dozen or more employees may have a rudimentary public
works department (including street, waterworks, and sanitation workers),
a police department, and perhaps a city clerk-treasurer's staff of two or
three persons. Small county governments typically have larger numbers of
separate departments, because of the many elected administrators and govern-
mental programs, but departmental staffs are usually very small. Among
counties of less than 10,000 population the average courthouse office --
clerk, treasurer, recorder -- has two to four "deputies" or employees
in addition to the elected or appointed administrator, while the highway
department -- ordinarily the largest -- may have as many as a dozen workers
on the road crew.

Except in some programs funded by federal and state funds, the personnel
practices of small governments often depart from civil service procedures.
Employees are usually appointed on a patronage basis -- if not through
political party connections, then through personal ties to governing board
members or elected administrators. They thus serve at the pleasure of
their bosses. But a kind of job security prevails in many small communities,
because of the reluctance of newly-elected officials to generate local
antagonisms by dismissing long-time and perhaps popular employees. Exceptions
are jurisdictions with locally-aggresive political parties -- primarily
counties and townships with partisan elections -- where employee turnover
is both expected and accepted with a change in party or factional control
of public office. (Sorauf, 1956).

The official behavior of administrators and other employees in such
contexts is informal and personal. On a daily basis, this is seen in several
patterns:

> -- Behavior that does not follow formally structured
>   bureaucratic roles.
> -- A distrust of outside expertise.
> -- The inability to enforce laws and regulations on
>   an objective basis.
> -- A mixture of private and public components in the
>   administration of some programs.

Informal Bureaucracy

The lack of specialization noted earlier in the behavior of elected
board members is a characteristic also of appointed administrators and

employees. The conventional concept of the professional public service emphasizes such criteria as rule of law, cold neutrality, and the isolation of public from personal roles as appropriate norms for the individual bureaucrat. These are norms which are difficult -- if not impossible -- for small-town bureaucrats to observe, because of the close links between government and other community institutions. Appointed employees as well as elected officeholders act on the basis of their personal community ties, and in response to the individual positions and needs of constituents.

Even the few executives or professionals employed by nonmetro local governments reject the norms of formal bureaucracy in their behavior. City managers, school superintendents, and other central administrators in small communities cannot retreat behind their desks, the budgets they prepare, or the aloofness of their professions. They are expected to behave, by constituents and elected officeholders, as neighbors and friends -- not as distant and neutral experts.

One consequence of this expectation is that such executives are not the strong, professional, independent administrators that their compatriots in larger communities are assumed to be. Small-town executives are generalists, responsible for much more than the specialized function of executive leadership. Most city managers in municipalities under 10,000 population hold multiple positions. They act also as directors of finance, purchasing agents, city engineers, street superintendents, building inspectors, and/ or civil defense directors (Booth, 1968, pp. 106-108; Grigg, 1968). And they perform these combined jobs without administrative staff, sometimes without secretarial assistance.

Obviously multiple responsibilities are necessary in the small government where limited resources and activities preclude an extensive division-of-labor in administrative assignments. But by operating as a jack-of-all-trades, a professional administrator seldom has the time or energy to engage in long-range planning, research, capital programming, and comprehensive budget preparation. Small city managers, David Booth points out, are continually chasing crises and being overwhelmed with routine details. Managers are expected to be at the end of a broken sewer line and on the scene of a major fire. They are expected to be knowledgable in many areas, and they operate constantly in the public view (Booth, 1968, p. 123).

The Distrust of Expertise

Reflecting the values of their constituents, small-town governing boards and administrators frequently display a distrust of expertise or technical information. There are several reasons for this. One is a perceived incompatibility between an informal approach to administration and one that is based on the application of abstract principles to specific tasks. The reliance on technical or expert skills implies a burdening of the governmental process; simplicity is reduced by the proliferation of

facts, paperwork and formal methodology. In certain public service areas -- most notably the design, construction, and maintenance of roads -- expertise is accepted and even highly regarded in nonmetro communities. But in most areas of local administration, it is often seen as the reverse of common sense (Friedman, 1971).

Experts represent foreign values -- another source of distrust -- because they have been trained in universities, and the professional norms and techniques they carry are usually urban in origin (Hahn, 1970). Often they are responsible for implementing at the local level unpopular state and federal mandates, in such programs as planning, environmental protection, and welfare. Furthermore, there is a matter of the "status inequality" between the experts and others in local government -- a gap that includes age differences (experts are usually younger than the governing board members who employ them), a distinction between cosmopolitan and local views of the world, and the sense of superiority that specialists on a subject convey to generalists (Clavel, 1968; Buck and Rath, 1970).

Most city and county governments in nonmetro areas do not employ profesionally trained chief executives, such as city managers. But for those that do, the attitudes about expertise affects governing board-executive relations. The boards are reluctant to delegate the kind of executive authority enjoyed by professional administrators in metropolitan communities. Small-town city managers, for example, often lack the power to hire and fire police chiefs and public works department heads, and the power to control departmental budget requests. An additional element in this relationship is the tendency of governing boards to intervene in what otherwise would be routine administrative decisions, thus undercutting executive autonomy.

More school superintendents are employed in nonmetro communities than other chief exeuctives, a result of the long-established acceptance of professional norms in local school administration. Superintendents are usually more respected -- or tolerated -- than other local experts because of the complexities of state laws which control local school districts. School boards are highly dependent on the technical abilities of their superintendents to interpret state requirements, and parents and others who place much value on education grant considerable prestige to these administrators. The superintendent in many communities thus can lead on education policy, acting as much as a policy initiator as an administrator. Nevertheless, this expertise has some built-in hazards; as Vidich and Bensman point out, the superintendent is often an "alien expert":

> The political maneuverings of the principal (superintendent) are
> resented by those groups before and against whom he displays his
> knowledge and technique. He remains an alien expert who cannot
> conceal the rationality of his calculations and operations. At this
> point, particularly with respect to budgetary considerations, the
> school board acts as a watchdog agency and always jealously guards
> this prerogative. Moreover, the board is always in a position to
> create an issue which leads to the removal or resignation of the
> principal (Vidich and Bensman, 1958, p. 200).

The relatively few chief executives employed by small city and county governments are seldom granted the degree of professional respect accorded school superintendents, because their jobs are assumed to involve less technical skill. Any successful businessman or other competent person can administer the general governmental programs of a city or county, many governing board members and other residents believe. Consequently managers, administrators, executive officers and other variously-named chief executives are often recruited from nonprofessional sources. Most of the executives surveyed in a 1960s study of 140 managers in cities under 10,000 population had not been trained in public management nor worked in manager government before their present positions. In fact about 30 per-cent of the managers were appointed to their positions while residing in the community -- an indication of the preference of many small city councils for "local boys" over outsiders (Booth, 1968, ch. 5). Managers of small cities often are recruited from backgrounds other than public administration -- from such positions as retail business, accounting, construction, military administration and engineering.

The likelihood of board-executive conflict is increased when a professionally-trained and motivated administrator is employed as a chief executive by a small city or county. He and his governing board may not share the same expectations as to his proper role. The professional emphasizes his complete responsibility and authority over administrative matters and the expectation that he will be listened to on policy questions. Board members, on the other hand, view him primarily as an executive assistant with delegated responsibilities. Frequent administrator-board clashes are thus inevitable over such issues as the chief executive's control of employee hiring and firing and the continual interference of individual board members in routine administrative matters.

Regulating Friends and Neighbors

Informality and personal government are often assets to the administration of public services in small communities. Government becomes more credible and worthy of support when its procedures are understood and close at hand, and its employees are well-known. From the perspective of the local administrator, close ties to the people of the community can reduce information costs and enhance compliance with governmental policy. Frederick Stocker writes of the ease of tax administration in certain villages because local officials know the occupations and approximate incomes of citizens (Stocker, 1977).

Yet there are broad areas of public administration where social intimacy is a decided liability. Much local administration involves the regulation of private activity, and here the styles of informality and personal government often work against fairness and the rule of law. Where administrators deal with citizens on a first-name and neighborly basis it is difficult to apply laws and regulations consistently across the board.

The clearest examples are in small-town police work, as this des-
cription of the job of the law enforcement officer suggests:

> The difficulty of his task is closely related to the number and the
> closeness of the personal bonds which tie him to the people he serves.
> It is more difficult to issue a ticket for an illegal U-turn on Main
> Street to one of his kinfolk, to an elder of his church, to a fellow
> Legionnaire... than to a person with whom he has no personal relation-
> ship whatever. In the average small community the local peace officer
> is more or less personally acquainted with most of the persons who
> come under his jurisdiction, and the typical situation which calls
> for official action causes him some degree of emotional concern
> (Hoiberg, 1955, p. 143).

Numerous small towns have experienced sharp disputes over the law enforcement
practices of a new and professionally-trained police chief, who attempts
an even-handed approach to traffic violations and more serious offences.
The result often is the dismissal of the chief, another instance of the
incompatibility of professional standards and small town values (Sherwood,
1963).

Another area of regulation of increasing importance to nonmetro government
is the implementation side of land use planning -- the enforcement of laws that
deal with subdividing land, zoning, and housing construction. Such
regulations are inherently unpopular in nonmetro communities, because of
the strong belief that private ownership of real estate should convey
virtually absolute control of its uses. To many small-community residents,
land use ordinances are the most blatant examples of governmental inter-
ference in personal liberty. Farmers, for example, have always disliked
rural zoning, despite its justification as a means of protecting land values
and preserving agriculture from urban development (Hahn, 1970).

As in police work, it is difficult for government officials and
employees involved in the implementation of land use controls to push around
their friends and neighbors. Decisions about applications to develop land
or construct buildings, or requests for variances, are more often than not
made on a case-by-case basis -- depending on the applicant's status and
reputation in the community. Knowing the economic and social circumstances
of local residents, officials often soften the law to accommodate "hardship"
cases -- the wish of a widow lady to conduct a small business in her home,
for example, or the plan of a farmer to place a mobile home on his land to
serve as a residence for an aged parent. Judgments based on such personal
and emotional standards are frustrating for professional planners and land
use attorneys, concerned more with consistency than individual accommodation.

In very small and rural communities, informal social pressures are
frequently more effective means of maintaining the objectives of a community
land use scheme than the strict application of the ordinances. Farmers
in a Michigan township, for example, placed a high value on the virtues

of a "clean countryside" and the few instances of unsightly nuisances were eliminated through friendly communication with the offenders. When non-conforming land uses were reported to officials in this community, the normal practice was to dispatch a member of the township board acquainted with the violator for a chat rather than taking formal action (Sokolow, 1968). With community growth and the appearance of new residents, of course, informal pressures become much less effective. But in fact the regulation of strangers can reduce the friends-and-neighbors problem.

Building code enforcement is a special case of land use regulation. The ordinances adopted by small counties and cities are often the standard national or statewide codes, developed originally for urban areas. Rural residents attempting to construct their own homes often dispute the logic of these standard codes, claiming that big city health and safety requirements are not necessary. The unpopularity of the standard codes has been widely expressed in recent years in rural areas of California, where numerous "counter culture" migrants from the cities have constructed inexpensive housing without such required features as flush toilets and indoor wiring (Andrews, 1977; Schretter, 1976).

At times conflicts of interest crop up among the officials responsible for land use regulation in a nonmetro community. Planning and zoning com-missioners, members of governing boards, and even professional planners sometimes find that they have direct or indirect personal interests in the matters that come before them. Such personal conflicts are difficult to avoid in the small community setting, where officeholders own property and have investments, and are otherwise tied into the community's major business and land networks.

The Public-Private Mixture: Volunteerism, Fire Departments, and Ingenuity

A traditional characteristic of small-town administration is the fuzziness of the distinction between "public" and "private," because extensive variations may occur in how a particular community service is provided and who is responsible for its administration. Two aspects of this mixture are apparent. On the one hand, some services regarded in larger and more urban settings as governmental obligations are not publicly admin-istered and financed in many small communities. Water supply and sanitary waste disposal, for example, are private responsibilities in most open-country areas and in many small population centers where families provide individual wells and septic tanks in place of hookups to more elaborate utility lines and plants. (Increasingly, though, clean water standards imposed by state and federal governments are forcing the organization of expensive municipal systems for small communities.) Local government is not the only option for administering services deemed essential in a nonmetro area. Both in theory and practice, the range of choices for providing an individual with a public good include himself, his friends, his landlord, or even a private contractor.

A second aspect concerns services which are officially governmental in terms of legal responsibility, but with considerable private participation or "volunteerism" in their implementation. The classic example is the tax-supported volunteer fire department. A suburban Michigan township of 8,000 persons, for example, maintained an efficient fire department in the 1960s by spending $22,000 annually. The tax money paid the salaries of a full-time chief and part-time assistant chief, and supported the purchase and maintenance of equipment as well as paying the debt on the recent construction of a new station. But the fire-fighting force was composed of 36 volunteers, local citizens who in this way contributed their time and energy to the community (Sokolow, 1968).

Still other examples of the public-private mixture were evident in the range of community services provided in this Michigan township. Despite rapid urbanization in the early 1960s, many of the township government's programs still maintained the individual participation of an earlier rural era. Residents in the less populated sections of the community arranged for the annual oiling by a private tank truck of the gravel township roads in their areas, and they regularly organized work parties to destroy road-side weeds. A women's society composed primarily of elderly farm wives aided in the upkeep of the tax-supported cemetery. The major recreational activity for the community's youngsters in the summer was a church-operated softball program, supported in part by township funds.

Such intermingling of public and private responsibilities has been an administrative characteristic of small communities ever since the origins of their public services. Historical accounts describe such beginnings as neighborhood schools supported by private subscriptions in Minnesota (Nelson, 1960, pp. 84-54) and citizens working out their "road tax" by devoting a few days every year to laboring on roads and bridges in Wisconsin and Oklahoma (Curti, 1959, pp. 40-41; Debo, 1944, pp. 21-22).

In current terms, such examples are manifestations of "volunteerism" -- the tendency of citizens to contribute time and energy to public ends. Fred Hitzhusen and others have suggested that local government expenditures are considerably less than they might be in many nonmetro communities because of volunteer efforts (Hitzhusen, 1977).

As well as reducing potential costs, volunteerism -- like its administrative counterparts of informal and personal government -- helps to produce citizen familiarity and support of local government, and generally strong and spirited community identification. Yet there are tradeoffs implicit in the delegation to private citizens of activities for which governments are legally responsibility. Accountability is at issue -- who controls the administration of the service, for whose benefit, and for what purpose? As formally-responsible bodies, elected governing boards have few sanctions or other methods for directing the actions of volunteers; they cannot be dismissed, their salaries cannot be reduced, and efforts to limit their scope of operations are effectively blunted by the obvious good-will inherent in their selfless work.

Volunteer fire departments maintained by local governments with tax funds are a case in point. Community service may be one incentive for joining such a force, but volunteer fire fighters usually are more motivated by the comraderie developed through frequent get-togethers and the excitement of responding to the alarm. In effect, a volunteer force is a close-knit club which new members join as a result of social acceptance rather than formal application and evaluation. The social club spends public funds in carrying out an essential public service, but the agency that raises the tax money -- the township or district board, the city council -- has little control over the administration of the funds. Particularly in growing communities, governing boards frequently are at odds with their volunteers over such issues as the selection of the chief, recruiting new members, and the time devoted to training and equipment upkeep.

It cannot be denied though that volunteerism often produces in small communities resourceful ways of administering public services. Notable recent examples in rural parts of northern California include the donation of labor and materials in the construction of a country school, and contributed legal and clerical assistance in the administration of a small municipal government. And in many unincorporated areas nonprofit community clubs or associations operate as "proto governments," maintaining recreational facilities, negotiating with county government regarding land-use policies, and providing forums for the resolution of community issues -- generally as an alternative to more formal and expensive governmental arrangements (Hogan, 1976).

Some Concluding Propositions

These generalizations about the political and administrative styles of nonmetro local governments are presented as modal tendencies, not conclusive findings. Without hard data, it is uncertain as to how widely applicable they may be to governing practices among small communities today. One limitation is that most of these generalization reflect in particular the characteristics of traditional rural communities -- very small, homogeneous, stable, and relatively isolated. With population growth and diversity and other socio-economic changes, such generalizations as the inability of local governing boards to handle serious conflict and the highly-informal nature of administration looses some applicability. How much, and under what circumstances, are open questions. Perhaps the most useful basic research yet to be done on the governance of nonmetro communities concerns the relationship between socio-economic and politico-governmental change: When and how do the small-community governments change in their political desire and administrative capacity to resolve major problems? Increased problem-solving capacity is seldom the automatic result of socio-economic shifts; the workings of such intervening variables as political organization and electoral competition are often necessary.

Based on this review of governing styles, I suggest several concluding propositions about the role and performance of nonmetro governments:

1. In small communities, greater importance is attached to the instruments than to the purposes of government -- the means rather than the ends.

2. Nonmetro local governments are cautious and defensive in dealing with community problems, rather than innovative and creative.

3. Yet small communities display considerable flexibility overall in how community services are organized and delivered -- as the comments about the public-private mixture and volunteerism indicate.

4. The distrust of expertise and the reluctance to delegate authority to professional administrators limits the ability of local governments to obtain and use information relevant to specific problems.

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