

## Planning Follows a River's Course

DAVID E. LILIENTHAL

The principles of democracy and efficiency embodied in TVA are basic to good planning in your own state, your own town—your own school. To help us see how planning may be guided by community initiative and needs—yet receive the benefits of federal sponsorship—David E. Lilienthal, chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, discusses the TVA program and the philosophy behind its operation.

THERE IS NOTHING NEW in the idea that planning is part of the responsibility of democratic government, whether it be done by the people of a city, a county, a state, or a nation. City officials who adopt a five-year school improvement program, or county officials who put an item for farm-to-market roads in their next year's budget are doing a planning job. When Congress enacts a law establishing a system of old-age and unemployment insurance, it also is planning.

Planning, however, like many other functions of democratic government, has had to find its way between the extremes of overly enthusiastic sponsorship and active distrust. By some, planning has been presented as the panacea for all ills, the shining and infallible instrument by which our many problems will rapidly reach solution. Others bristle at the sound of the word "planning." To them the word suggests centralized authority, regimentation of people's lives, or sly domination and manipulation of their views and actions.

Neither attitude fully reflects the facts. Planning is needed—and most of all in a society pledged to the ideal of freedom. But it is only the first step in achieving social change, greater freedom of choice, greater opportunity for the individual.

Planning alone cannot solve problems. It can, however, obtain for us a better definition of what the problems are. It can

lay the basis of fact and knowledge as a prelude to agreement about what needs to be done. And it can suggest and add to, in the process, the knowledge and the skills we need to have to put our agreements into action.

But if the overzealous friends of planning tend to credit planning with unlimited virtues, its opponents are equally in error in their arbitrary opposition to the idea of planning. Largely, I believe, their opposition is based on distrust of certain processes which have come to be identified as "planning," even though these processes do not represent what seem to many to be sound and effective methods. For the distrust arises from a fear that plans will be made *for* the citizens of a community or state or nation and then imposed upon it, with or without its consent.

People in a democracy are well advised to distrust such "planning." Here they distrust a process, however—not planning itself. Because of this distrust, the process of preparing expertly designed plans, unrelated to the thinking of those for whom they are developed, is being cast aside as a tool or weapon of a self-appointed elite.

### *No Closed-Door Decisions*

In its place it is heartening to observe the rise in strength of a process by which planning is done through full interchange

of ideas and thoughts among experts and the people of the community, and decision for action continues to reside where it belongs—among the people themselves. As this process becomes widely prevalent, planning will progress without extreme partisanship or opposition. It will achieve maturity as an effective and tried instrument of government; it will develop better plans; and we as a people will create a better future for ourselves and our children.

Although the fact of planning is well established and familiar, there is today a great deal of new interest in the methods or processes of democratic planning. People as a group have a growing determination to be truly represented in the planning process, to see that it is carried on in the open, and that its facts and assumptions are made clear to them in terms that they understand. People are increasingly impatient of local measures planned behind closed doors in response to sometimes dubious private pressures and of state and national programs put forward without clear exposition of the facts and purposes behind them. People are coming to demand that their future shall not be an inscrutable mystery for whose revelation they must await flashes of inspired official wisdom. They see that to a large extent *their future is what they make it* and they are concerned with the arrangements through which their thoughts and aspirations can be brought to bear on shaping that future.

Obviously, our political institutions cannot all be as direct and simple as the New England town meeting where citizens may voice their thoughts and hopes, and plan measures to satisfy both. In the larger and more complicated units of government, intermediate devices are used to discover and crystallize citizen opinion and to

formulate measures expressing it. These devices take on many forms and undoubtedly will take on many more as we continue to develop new governmental methods adapted to the needs of succeeding generations.

### *Framework for Planning*

In general, the instrumentalities of democratic planning are of two sorts: first, official agencies functioning within the framework of the local, state, and national governments; and second, unofficial agencies representing some cross section of citizen interest and prepared to bring popular opinion to bear on the legislative and administrative branches.

Unofficial instrumentalities of planning are of many types, variously known as civic or planning associations, citizens' planning councils, etc. They frequently help to discover and elicit a mature popular opinion in forms informative and indispensable to the official agencies of government. Very often, however, they assume the added function of making specific recommendations, provoking discussion, and gathering popular support for their adoption. Such unofficial bodies perform another important function by representing the over-all interest of a metropolitan area or other region in which official bodies are hampered by the limited scope of their local jurisdictions.

Among the official planning agencies the legislative committee is one of the oldest and most widely used. It is set up to hold hearings and conduct investigations so that popular aspirations may be translated into recommendations for legislative action. More closely allied with the idea of planning in the public mind are such agencies as the official planning boards or commissions of states, counties, and municipalities which also distill spe-

cific recommendations for action from the thinking of their communities.

The Tennessee Valley Authority—better known simply as TVA—is an instrument of democratic planning that differs in many respects from its predecessors. It is an official agency but its sphere of operations does not coincide with the territory of any unit of government. It is a national agency because only the federal government has been given authority, by the people, which is broad enough to encompass the multiple problems of an interstate river basin; yet the region with which it is concerned comprises a relatively small part of the nation's total area. The TVA is in daily contact with the governments of hundreds of municipalities and counties and of the seven Valley states, but it is not officially a part of the governmental machinery of any of them. (Indeed TVA has no governmental power to compel action, save only a limited authority to acquire land by judicial proceedings.) Obviously the precise patterns of organization and operation that had been adopted for other planning agencies could not be expected to fit the very different situation in the Tennessee Valley.

### *TVA—a New Way of Working*

People familiar with the phraseology of state planning enabling acts and the provisions of city charters and ordinances creating official planning bodies look in vain for comparable definitions of planning powers and duties in the TVA Act. TVA "powers" are not set up in that way for two reasons.

In the first place TVA is both a planning and an operating agency; much of the Act is devoted to the exercise of the federal functions of developing the river and operating the government-owned chemical plants at Muscle Shoals. But of

more significance is the fact that regional planning for an area so extensive and varied as the Tennessee Valley is something new to American experience. Congress wisely phrased the planning responsibilities of TVA in general terms. It refrained from describing detailed duties and procedures, but emphasized two guiding principles:

*First*, that planning should be concerned with the better use, conservation, and development of the resources of the region.

*Second*, that the enterprise should be a collaborative undertaking enjoying the full participation of the people of the region and their established institutions and local agencies of government.

The Tennessee River drainage basin is a completely logical unit of planning in only one respect—the use and control of water. In other respects its problems and opportunities are shared with adjacent portions of the southeastern states, or are localized in communities or subregions within its boundaries. Comprehensive development plans for the watershed area alone would have little validity, for in most respects such plans could be executed only by state or local units for which the watershed boundary has little legal or administrative meaning. Planning in a region defined in this way must be directly related to the various governmental units that compose it and to the state and the nation areas of which it is a part.

As a planning agency of the federal government TVA is authorized to prepare plans and make recommendations for Congressional action on matters of federal concern. This authorization has been used as a basis for relatively few major regional studies and reports on problems clearly of Congressional legislative concern—for ex-

ample, freight rates as an economic barrier to regional development or the need for an adequate supply of power at low rates. For the most part, however, TVA early recognized that the progress of the region is to be achieved by a multitude of actions, decisions, and understandings among individuals, localities, and the county and state governments, and in this field TVA was authorized to study local problems and to undertake research, experiments, and demonstrations that could be used and observed by the people in the region as an aid and stimulus to local planning, discussion, and action.

### *Local Leadership Takes a Hand*

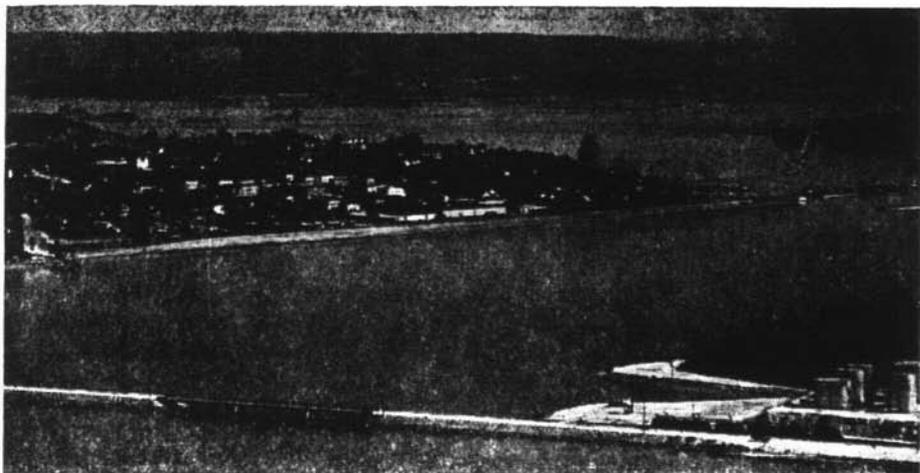
How this has been done can be described best by illustration. The Tennessee River is of course the core—though by no means the whole—of the Tennessee Valley program. It is a resource of incalculable value to the region, for navigation, for power, for recreation, for domestic and industrial water supply. Because it is a navigable river, its development falls under an established federal function, but hundreds of local governmental jurisdictions and many states feel the effects of that development. Whether the development of the river means much or little to the region depends on how well these local jurisdictions handle the problems and opportunities it brings.

Before the first of the great river development works was well under way, it became apparent that an important new resource would be created in the recreational values of the lakes impounded by the dams. TVA had two choices, either to develop those values itself as part of its general construction program and manage them in trust for the people, or to encourage the states and localities of the region to plan their development as parts

of comprehensive programs for the general welfare of the people within their jurisdictions. The first course was attractive. It had the advantage of integrated planning for all of the lakes of a single system, of high standards of development, of the uniformity of centralized management. But it offered little opportunity for local participation, and even less for local understanding of the part that recreational use of the river could play in building up the economy of the region. So the second course was chosen.

As a basis for local action and a stimulus to local thinking, TVA used its authority for research to make an inventory of all the recreation resources of the region—lakes, mountains, forests, points of historic interest, and so on, discussing the subject with people in all parts of the region. The results were made available to interested citizens and officials and were widely publicized through local newspapers. Also, TVA used its authority to conduct demonstrations to secure the cooperation of the National Park Service and CCC program in the construction of three experimental lakeside parks. It made known that the technical experience gained in these surveys and demonstrations was available to any local agency interested in developing recreation resources.

The stimulus of the studies and demonstrations was sufficient to mobilize the various sectors of local leadership that had already been interested in the region's recreational possibilities and to gather popular support for broader programs. The state of Tennessee established, for the first time, a Department of Conservation with a State Parks Division that now is administering nine completed parks and is planning a statewide system of recreation areas. More than fifteen municipalities and counties along the river have taken action



TVA Photo

... from land-locked town to thriving river port

to establish local lakeside parks. The state of Tennessee made a study of the economic value of the tourist trade, and on the basis of careful traffic counts and surveys of spending habits concluded that more than a hundred million dollars had been brought into the state from that source in the last prewar year. But most important, active planning for the conservation of the region's scenic assets and for the careful development of its recreational possibilities through both public and private channels is now spreading throughout the area. This is of the greatest moment: *that wide popular appreciation has developed of the social and economic values to be gained and of the measures needed to secure them.*

#### *Blue Lakes Where Cotton Bloomed*

Another illustration of planning method lies in the story of a river town that faced economic strangulation when a new reservoir was to be built. Here adversity was turned into an asset. Before the construc-

tion of Guntersville Dam, the town of Guntersville in northern Alabama was a quiet rural center built on a narrow ridge surrounded by fertile river bottom lands. It contained a small textile mill and some cotton warehouses but it made its living principally from trade with the surrounding farmers. The new reservoir would flood all of the surrounding bottom land and some of the town's commercial and industrial property, a pretty severe economic blow for a small town to take. The blow was softened only by the fact that it would take two years to build the dam and fill the reservoir. That time could be used to plan for the necessary adjustments.

In the first moments of despair the townspeople turned to TVA for a plan of salvation, but they were quick to see that their problem could be permanently solved only through their own initiative and enterprise. They organized a city planning commission and obtained the assistance of their State Planning Board and the State

University in studying their situation. TVA could either protect the commercial area with a dyke or buy out additional properties that would otherwise be flooded. The town preferred the dyke. They decided to stick with the uncertain prospects for the future encouraged by the new asset—a navigable channel in a beautiful lake. They saw the possibility of promoting the recreation industry as a replacement for agriculture in their trade territory. They began to study the prospect of new commercial opportunities which might grow from the navigation channel at their door. In short, they took it upon themselves to think their problems through and to adopt the local measures needed for their solution, and they did a very good job. Of course TVA helped with technical advice and guidance, but it helped principally by encouraging the people of the town and the officials of their own state agencies to keep the ball in their own hands and to judge the future for themselves.

With the completion of Guntersville Dam, the city of Guntersville, instead of occupying a ridge bordered by cotton fields, now rests on a long peninsula bordered by great expanses of blue water, framed in mountain ridges and dotted with small islands. On one side of the peninsula is the commercial waterfront, where barges from the Ohio basin unload and take on their cargoes and wheat is brought in from Minneapolis. On the other side of the peninsula a recreation area has been set aside and active plans are on foot for swimming beaches and picnic grounds. At the tip of the peninsula, a small city park provides docks and anchorages where people from as far away as Birmingham take off for fishing and boating trips. The city's population has doubled and the city is prospering.

All the waterfront was acquired by TVA in its reservoir land purchase and is still in federal ownership. But by voluntary agreement, the use of that land is subject to the city's recommendation and its planning board reviews every proposal. Recently TVA received an application for the lease of one of the last remaining pieces of the town's deep water frontage for a large grain elevator. The question was passed to the city planning board. Was it a good thing to give up so much of the town's limited frontage to this purpose? How much business and employment would a grain elevator create? What other enterprises might want such a site and what were their relative advantages and disadvantages from the city's standpoint? These were questions that many larger cities might flounder over, but Guntersville had learned to think about its future as a community and to take action deliberately and intelligently.

#### *Communities With Work to Do*

Guntersville is a dramatic example of local planning that has grown out of the Tennessee Valley program but there are many others, many where the stimulus was less direct, the situation less critical, but where local initiative asserted itself with equal vigor. The state planning commissions of Tennessee, Alabama, and Virginia provide, as one of their major functions, planning assistance to their states' communities. Other Valley states are considering similar programs. Some of this probably would have happened if there had been no regional planning agency such as TVA, but a lot of it would not have taken place.

As these illustrations suggest, we in TVA believe that the development of local initiative and responsibility is the essence of sound democratic planning. Not only

do better, more workable plans result from wide participation in their development, but a higher good is served also. As I have said elsewhere: "The often flabby muscles of community and individual responsibility will never be invigorated unless the muscles are given work to do. They grow strong by use; there is no other way."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes governments, even democratic governments, forget that their ultimate aim is to foster the ability of citizens to draw out of their own minds, de-

<sup>1</sup> Lilienthal, David E.: *TVA: Democracy on the March*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944.

sires and needs, solutions to the problems that plague them. Democratic responsibility is the complement of democratic freedom. No public agency which by paternalism or domination diminishes the social responsibility of citizens can be considered helpful, however much its short-term program may seem to improve matters. It is on this profound conviction that TVA proceeds. It does not make plans for anyone, but finds a hundred ways of helping the people of the region to discover the alternatives of free choice, to assess the direction in which those choices may lead them, and to choose the course they prefer.

□ Community councils tackle local problems in Pittsburgh area

## When Neighbors Get Together

WILLIAM BACON

Alert school people are quick to lend support to community groups seeking to improve the neighborhood, and they know that the active interest of teachers in such programs is a vital factor in integrating school and community. To give us an insight into how community planning works, William Bacon, executive secretary of the Association of Community Councils, Pittsburgh, Pa., describes the neighborhood programs in the urban area of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, a locality where crowded living and diversity in race and nationality create unusually difficult situations.

IN THE SMALL TOWN there is usually a rather high degree of community integration. The very smallness of this type of community makes it possible for the school person, the clergyman, the parent, the civic leader, and the interested citizen to know each other and to cooperate on various communitywide programs. In such a community the recognition of neighborhood problems is general. If a new school building is needed or a gang of boys indulges in vandalism, the whole town knows about it and is concerned about it. In this situation all the community

resources can be brought to bear upon the solution of the problem. The small town is the backbone of American democracy because in it are found a basic unity in community living, a quick recognition of its problems, and a ready cooperation to solve those problems.

Urban living has upset much of the community-mindedness and the natural approach to community problems that characterized the growth of American democracy. The size of the urban community has made it impossible for the people to know each other as they would

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