

Center for Government Services

Social Equity for Planning Commissioners: An Introduction

A Presentation by

Stuart Meck, FAICP/PP
Faculty Fellow and Director
Center for Government Services, Edward J. Bloustein School of
Planning and Public Policy
Rutgers
Email: stumeck@rci.rutgers.edu

APA National Planning Conference
Las Vegas, NV, April 30, 2008

Order of Presentation

- What is social equity?
- Where did the concept come from?
- Examples of plans
- Examples of strategies
- An exercise
- Some questions for you

What is social equity

- Definition: “Equity planning is a framework . . . that advances and implements policies and programs that redistribute public and private resources to the poor and working class in cities”

--John T. Metzger

What is social equity?

- Equity is an issue of distributive justice, an examination of the distribution of gains and losses, which sometimes requires compensatory action

--William Lucy

What is social equity?

- Definition: “The goal of social equity is the equalization of access to resources”

--Emily Talen

What is social equity—a comment

- “A neutral planning stance on equity issues ignores the windfall and wipeout effects not only of land use decisions but also of capital expenditures and service programs”

--Israel Stollman

Where did the concept come from?

- Settlement house movement
- Community health and welfare planning councils
- Demonstration projects—Ford Foundation “Grey Areas” Projects
- Community action agencies
- Model Cities program

Where did the concept come from?

- Norman Williams, Jr.: “Planning Law and Democratic Living” (1955)--
Explicit recognition of linkage between physical and social development in city planning

Distinction between physical and social is “artificial and untenable”

Where did the concept come from?

- Paul Davidoff (1967): Advocacy planning offers alternative solutions outside of the “official plans” of government agencies. Planners serve as advocates for specific interests, especially the poor.

Examples of plans

- Cleveland Policy Planning Report (1975)

- Goal: In a context of limited resources and pervasive inequalities, priority attention must be given to the task of promoting a wider range of choices for those who have few, if any.



Cleveland, cont'd

- Examples of objectives:
 - Improve the mobility of those residents who cannot drive or cannot afford automobiles and are dependent on public transportation
 - Stop the process of neighborhood deterioration

Cleveland Mayor Tom Johnson and His Planning Staff (1973)



Examples of plans

- Chicago Development Plan (1984)
 - Goal: Increased job opportunities for Chicagoans
 - Policies: Local preference in buying and hiring
 - Policies: Create neighborhood-based industrial retention program by working with local development corporations

Examples of social equity policies or strategies

- Linkage programs for office/commercial development
- Fair-share affordable housing programs
- Environmental justice/distributional issues in the siting of controversial land uses
- Inclusionary zoning
- School voucher programs and charter schools
- Waivers of assessments in l/m neighborhoods
- Integration of group homes into neighborhoods

Alternate Concepts of Equity

- Equality—equal pay for equal work
- Need—May vary and can be unequal for an area
- Demand, through use of a service and requests and complaints
- Willingness to pay—let the market determine equity

Problem: Select the location of a neighborhood park based on equity concepts

- Use national standards for population and spacing
- Find the area with the most underserved people
- Find the area with the most underserved people who are also heavy park users
- Conduct surveys in underserved neighborhoods to determine amount of usage and location of users and would they be willing to pay a special assessment

Questions for Discussion

- How has social equity figured in planning debates in your community?
- What risks does a planning commission face when it undertakes social equity planning?

