Social Equity for Planning Commissioners: An Introduction

A Presentation by

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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?