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State Development
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OCTOBER, 1958

GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRENDS IN IOWA

("Committee of One Hundred")

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Final Report of the Sub-Committee on

C O M M U N I T Y D E V E L O P M E N T

Members of the Sub-Committee:

- Harry Boyd, Cedar Rapids (Chairman)
- R. L. Caswell, Clarinda (Secretary)
- Professor George M. Beal, Ames
- C. J. Hearst, Cedar Falls
- M. F. Oberg, Des Moines
- P. L. Mercer, Keokuk
- J. L. Nelson, Des Moines

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This committee has concentrated its attention on ways and means by which the communities of Iowa might be encouraged and helped to use their own resources to achieve the maximum in human satisfactions. It has concerned itself with the social organization and resources that exist or can be developed whereby interested groups, institutions, governmental units and publics may work together to analyze their resources, delineate their problems, set realistic goals, select means, and act effectively to bring about over-all community improvement.

The committee did not feel limited to "the community" as a focus of social action. It believes that much can be accomplished through "community" action as commonly understood. However, equally important, if not more important, action programs may well embrace several communities, the county, groups of counties, or economic areas.

Since the organization meeting of the Governor's Commission on Social and Economic Trends in March, the Committee on Community Developments has undertaken to familiarize itself with the sources of help available to Iowa communities that would like to better themselves. It has sought information

and advice from a number of persons who have devoted much time and thought to community development problems and ways of solving them. It has reviewed a sizable volume of printed material produced by various public agencies and private organizations which have been working in the field of community development. (See Appendix for detailed list.)

In the light of its studies and hearings the committee has reached some general conclusions.

Except in the larger cities, community life in Iowa has developed mostly out of individual adaptation to existing conditions and changing circumstances, with relatively little organized planning. The result is a living environment in most cities and towns which, notwithstanding varying degrees of praiseworthy charm, leaves much to be desired.

Not only the lack of economic opportunities but also the shortcomings of many Iowa towns as places in which to live a well-rounded, satisfying life undoubtedly have been important factors in the widely deplored tendency of thousands of Iowa's young men and women to seek their happiness elsewhere. This, after their home communities have invested much time and money in their education and personality growth. Many of the adults who remain also are keenly conscious of deficiencies in elements that would greatly enrich their lives.

Our fine, venturesome young people are among the state's most precious resources. If Iowa is to maintain a vigorous, well-balanced citizenry and economy, everything should be done which can be done to make them want to stay in their home state. This means not only by providing them with opportunities to earn a good livelihood but by providing also the additional enriching values that make for a stimulating, contented family life. It means more jobs -- as the people of most Iowa communities readily recognize -- but it also means such things as good schools and churches, efficient local government, well-kept homes and yards, paved and clean streets, modern street lighting, well-equipped parks and playgrounds, recreational and cultural facilities

for people of all ages, and adequate utility services.

In most communities in Iowa there are people who are aware of local shortcomings in these and similar respects. Some communities are deeply concerned and already are working hard to remedy the deficiencies. The larger cities have, or can afford to provide, the machinery and professional resources for planned effort to cope with such problems. In many of the smaller towns, however, there is a deplorable lack of the know-how required to shake off general apathy, mobilize competent leadership and manpower, and spark the organized attack on basic problems that would result in marked community improvement.

All communities in Iowa, and the state as a whole in turn, would benefit appreciably from more carefully planned, well-organized and well-executed long-range programs for community development. Recognition of the need and most of the impetus toward improvement, the planning and leadership, the money, the manpower, and the sustained effort required must come from within the community itself. Successful measures for community improvement cannot be imposed from outside. Outsiders can give valuable assistance and encouragement but they cannot do the whole job, or even any large part of it.

All community improvement programs will have certain common characteristics, but each community's program must be tailored to fit its own peculiar needs, as appraised by its own citizens. It is important that the program be based on awareness and understanding of the broad regional, state and national trends that bear on the community's future, and that it be adapted to move with those trends rather than against them.

A logical starting point for any intelligent community improvement program is a complete inventory and realistic appraisal of the community's assets and liabilities. This appraisal should not be done by a self-constituted elite group; as many as possible of the people of the community should have an active part in it. The participation of the young people is especial-

ly important, for it is they for whom the future of the community should be shaped.

The best community improvement programs will not be limited in scope by arbitrary political boundary lines but will take into account natural communities of social and economic interest which embrace related urban and rural areas. The metropolitan areas of the state, particularly, are badly in need of modernized machinery and techniques for dealing with area-wide problems from this broader perspective. (Note: The Committee considers the last-mentioned matter exceedingly important and has touched on it lightly only on the assumption that the subject logically will be considered by one of the other subcommittees in greater depth.)

There is a vast amount of knowledge in Iowa of how to go about remedying the conditions and solving the problems that are retarding sound community development. Many agencies and organizations are concerned about community development in Iowa and are carrying on more or less effective programs in various segments of the field. These include, among others, the Iowa Development Commission, the Institute of Public Affairs at the State University, the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service at Iowa State College, the Iowa Council for Community Improvement and many chambers of commerce, women's clubs, Parent-Teacher groups, farm and labor organizations and business and industrial institutions.

In most instances these agencies and organizations are concerned primarily with limited specific aspects of community development. This is not bad in itself but there is an urgent need for better communication among the people who are working in the field. There is also need for a better organizational structure, to enable people to look at the whole picture and to coordinate their activities, so that constructive partial approaches will add up to balanced over-all improvement of communities.

There is urgent need for better means of communicating to leaders in

the various towns and cities the knowledge and advice of professional and semi-professional people within the state who are both willing and able to give them valuable help toward improving their communities.

In view of these and other considerations based on its studies, the Committee on Community Development recommends specifically that:

An agency of ^{the state} ~~of~~ ~~be set~~ up to maintain adequate communication among all agencies and organizations working in the field of community development and to keep the citizens of Iowa well informed as to the assistance available to them from these sources. Such an agency should have a competent full-time director, assisted by a limited number of skilled professional workers in community development. The operations of the agency should be supported in part by reasonable fees paid by the communities which utilize its services. One of the prime functions of the agency should be to consult with local leaders in communities throughout the state and:

1. Encourage them in their desire to improve their communities.
2. Help them identify and realistically appraise the resources and problems of their communities.
3. Supply them with, or advise them where they can obtain, the best available information on possible solutions.
4. Counsel with them in their choice of the most promising solutions for their own communities.
5. Assist them in organizing and planning realistic programs for improving their communities.
6. Stimulate them to carry out their locally accepted programs in a sustained, persistent, orderly way.

More thorough study would be required to determine the most desirable form for such an agency. Three possibilities to which the committee has given some thought are:

1. A Community Development Service Committee consisting of appointed representatives of the three state institutions of higher learning (where most of the present resources for aid in community development are

concentrated) and supported in part by an increased appropriation to the State Board of Regents.

2. A special Community Development Service division of the Iowa Development Commission to deal with phases of community development other than promotion of industry and supported in part by an increase in the appropriation to the Iowa Development Commission.
3. A separate State Planning Commission, supported in part by a direct appropriation.

The Committee further recommends that:

1. The various agencies and organizations now working in the field of community development in Iowa be commended on their past and present programs and urged to cooperate with the proposed state community-service agency.
2. That existing state laws be modified to permit a greater degree of cooperation among towns and counties in possible joint efforts to solve area-wide community problems, and to permit cities a wider range of choice among possible solutions of local community rehabilitation and mass transit problems.
3. That cities and towns in Iowa be urged to adopt and enforce modern zoning and housing laws in the interest of efficient land use and sound, orderly growth.
4. That thorough studies be made of the advantages and disadvantages of annexation of fringe areas and suburbs to cities, and of possible changes in assessment techniques to assure a fairer distribution of taxes between central and outlying areas.

APPENDIX

In its activities leading up to the submission of this report the Committee has had extended personal conferences with a number of key men in organizations working in the field of community development, including:

Richard Fernbach, Des Moines city planning director.
Dr. William Stacy, of the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State College.
Dr. Robert Ray and Dr. Dean Zenor of the Institute of Public Affairs, State University of Iowa.
Harold V. Miller, executive director of the Tennessee State Planning Commission.
P. L. Mercer of the Union Electric Company and a member of our committee.

In addition the Committee has reviewed written reports and other printed materials solicited from:

Iowa Development Commission
Nebraska Community Education Project
Southern Illinois University, Area Services
Engineering Extension Service, Iowa State College
Bureau of Business & Economic Research, State University of Iowa
Iowa State Grange
Iowa Council for Community Improvement
Iowa Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State College
H. Clay Tate, editor, The Bloomington (Illinois) Pantagraph
Iowa Recreation Workshop Association
Iowa Public Service Company
Iowa Electric Light & Power Company
Iowa Southern Utilities Company
Iowa-Illinois Gas & Electric Company
Interstate Power Company

Among the publications found to be very valuable in determining resources available to communities was Improving Iowa's Communities, Institute of Public Affairs of the State University of Iowa in cooperation with the Iowa Council for Community Improvement. This book lists the opportunities and some of the activities and resources available from some thirty agencies, organizations and areas of activity.