Cutback management and its effects on comprehensive planning and service delivery: Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission: A case study

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CUTBACK MANAGEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY: BROOKE-HANCOCK-JEFFERSON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION: A CASE STUDY

A DEGREE PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

BY
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JULY 1983
ABSTRACT

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B.A., University of Steubenville, 1979

Cutback Management and Its Effects on Comprehensive Planning and Service Delivery--Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission: A Case Study

Advisor: Dr. Keith C. Simmonds

Degree Paper dated June 28, 1983

The primary intent of this degree paper is to discuss the functions of the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson (BHJ) Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission, a regional commission in the Upper Ohio Valley, and the effects of decreased funding on this organization's ability to provide services to area governments. An attempt has also been made to present alternative solutions of reducing staff and personnel without threatening the existence of the organization itself. Private and public organizations' solutions are presented along with those of the writer.

Regional planning commissions have played key roles in communicating regional needs to state and federal agencies and offices; initiating or suggesting programs or policies to area governments which would address local problems; and facilitating the use of available public funds for local projects. These types of organizations have been instrumental in getting county and municipal governments to work together on issues and problems that transcend state, county and local boundaries. However, the point of this discussion is how such organizations
deal with a decline in funds which would affect the delivery of the aforementioned services.

The BHJ Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission is presented as an organization that faced the problem, derived and initiated a method of cutting back services and personnel, and retained a high quality and quantity of services rendered.

The main sources of information were notes made during the internship experience, books that provided insights on the types of regional planning commissions and the definition of cutback management, and the BHJ Regional Development Plan. Personal interviews were also conducted with practitioners in the field of cutback management.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Regional planning commissions could be characterized as the silent fourth level of government. When one thinks of the levels of government, one may automatically visualize the traditional levels of federal, state and local governments. It would take a conscious effort to realize that regional commissions are also a level of government which operates simultaneously between federal and state levels, state and local levels, two state levels, or among several local levels.

Commenting during the early 1970's on regional commissions, Melvin Levin wrote: "By the mid 1970's, Americans may well take for granted a new level of government - a region that covers several states, or includes portions of several. ...In most (instances), their boundaries will follow relatively predictable lines based on unifying socio-economic factors operating in a plausible geographic area."\(^1\) Of course, once recognition is given to regional commissions, one may ask what purpose do they serve? Are they effective?

This paper attempts to examine the roles that regional commissions were meant to play and attempts to measure how closely a particular commission came to fulfilling these roles.

\(^1\) Melvin Levin, Community and Regional Planning (NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 245.
A case study is presented on whether this commission has proved successful in executing the roles of leader and/or facilitator in recognizing and solving regional problems, and whether it remains successful in the wake of budget cut-backs and reduction of organizational activities.
II. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Internship Experience

The internship experience took place in Steubenville, Ohio from September through December 1981. The agency that provided the internship placement was the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson (BHJ) Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. The agency served Brooke and Hancock Counties in West Virginia and Jefferson County in Ohio. The agency's primary role was that of consultant and clearinghouse on federal and state grant activities and applications.

The internship experience could be divided into three areas: financial overview, research and observation. While in the Ohio office, the intern obtained an exposure to the day-to-day workings of finance management of the agency as well as an opportunity to research an economic problem in the BHJ region. While in the West Virginia office, the intern was able to observe the consultancy role of the agency in providing information and aid to county and city government officials, and the facilitator's role in arranging housing rehabilitation for low-income areas.

The duties of the intern were varied and took in several areas of public administration. The official capacity served by the intern was that of Assistant to the Accountant/
Bookkeeper. The immediate supervisor was the Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director.

The most interesting aspect of the financial overview experience was the assignment of charges to federal grants. BHJ handled grants from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Labor hours spent on projects falling under any of these grants were charged to the appropriate grants. At the end of a two-week pay period (80 hours), the bookkeeper not only had a pay record for each employee, but also dollar figures that would be charged against each grant for the pay period and a running total of funds spent to date.

BHJ spearheaded an economic development project aimed at alleviating the economic problems in the Upper Ohio Valley. The Valley is primarily a steel-producing area with two major steel companies dominating employment. For approximately 40-50 years Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel and Weirton Steel Division of National Steel provided jobs for this region. However, the mid to late 1970's showed a decline in the demand of steel. As a direct result, a decline in steel demand created a downturn in the local economy. The region began suffering because steel-related jobs were being eliminated. Layoffs became widespread.

BHJ, the Jefferson County Regional Planning Commission, the Steubenville Chamber of Commerce and the Steubenville Metropolitan Planning and Redevelopment Commission came together
and evaluated the situation. One avenue of solution was to find positive attributes in the area and devise a way to turn these attributes into economic growth for the community. With this in mind, the committee agreed that positive attributes could be found in land and land usage, and proceeded to identify tracts of land that could be used for development. Each organization took one or two tracts and investigated them.

The intern was assigned the task of researching two tracts of land for BHJ. The research included defining ownership, valuation and availability of utilities. The size and location of property also determined the attractiveness of the land. Owners were also contacted to learn of their future plans for the use of these tracts.

The internship time spent in the West Virginia office was quite different from that spent in the Ohio office. Here the intern saw the facilitator's role of the organization more clearly. The primary assignment in the Brooke-Hancock (BH) office was to research newspaper clippings and compose notes for the 1983 Regional Development Plan. The plan outlined areas of community needs that were served by funds from various state, regional and/or federal grants. The newspaper clippings served as a basis for constructing progress reports on projects in the Brooke and Hancock Counties. They documented the projects undertaken, types or sources of funding and status at which the projects stood.

Lastly, the intern observed the work of the Housing Rehabilitation Coordinator in housing repair. Various local, state
and regional governments contribute funds for program administration and actual construction expenses on qualifying homes. The ARC and HUD, the principal contributors to the program, communicate guidelines as to which residential areas in the BH region qualify and the income level the owners must fall within before Rehab monies could be appropriated.

The purpose of the program is to bring housing up to Section 8 standards in underprivileged or neglected sections of the Appalachian Region. (Section 8 is a federal (HUD) guideline which states the minimum housing standards a poverty-line family should live in.)

In summary, the intern participated in the bookkeeping/accounting activities and investigative research for the industrial development project in the Ohio office, and in research and housing rehabilitation activities in the West Virginia office.

The Agency

The Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission played many roles in the Upper Ohio Valley. But to point out the most significant role is very difficult. Each role that BHJ assumed resulted in a valuable service or action that benefited the region.

BHJ has the official responsibility for clearing applications for federally-approved (and funded) programs and projects. Local governments wishing to obtain funds for sewerage or drainage systems, for example, would enlist the aid of BHJ
staff members in preparing the necessary applications. BHJ would review such applications in their final form and forward them to the appropriate federal agencies with its recommendations.

More importantly, though, it should be pointed out that BHJ was and is an active participant in pointing out the needs of the region and in formulating plans of action. BHJ was instrumental in solving the public transit problem in Steubenville. When the Steubenville Bus Company went out of business in October 1981, low-income, handicapped and elderly citizens were hardest hit by the loss of public transportation. A privately-owned taxi-cab business attempted to fill the transit gap, but soon found it unprofitable and gave up the venture. The BHJ Executive Director and his staff actively worked with city officials and took the lead in organizing a transit authority. Twelve months later, buses were once again running within the city limits of Steubenville.

BJH has filled the role of communicator. During the fall of 1981 much discussion was going on over a proposed highway bypass which would start at the western corporation limits of Wintersville, Ohio (immediately west of Steubenville) to the eastern corporation limits of Weirton, West Virginia - a total of ten miles at most. BHJ, working with the Ohio Department of Transportation, developed alternative routes for the bypass, and compiled information for community hearings. At one such hearing, the BHJ staff members were in the forefront explaining
the implications for neighborhoods and businesses should any one alternative be chosen.

BHJ has played the role of initiator. As mentioned in the Internship Experience section, BHJ initiated the activity of the Industrial Development Committee. BHJ was successful in starting a chain of events that has, at present, resulted in the Jefferson County Regional Planning Commission handling the project. This agency now works with state development offices on the particulars of putting parcels of land on the market and drawing the attention of potential investors.

Lastly, BHJ filled the role of facilitator. Again, as mentioned earlier, BHJ, particularly the West Virginia office, facilitated the use of public funds for housing rehabilitation. The agency was also useful in bringing private contractors and local officials together for the purpose of providing housing for the elderly and locating them in areas that provided easy access to commercial centers while fulfilling local zoning requirements.

BHJ proved to be an active organization, one that held a positive influence in the Upper Ohio Valley. The roles pointed out in this section merely scratch the surface of the depth of BHJ's impact on the affected communities.

The Problem

The Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission has been experiencing problems in providing the same level of quality and quantity of service over the three-
county area, due to reduced funding. The agency has had to face the reality that cutbacks would have to occur in one of three ways: by reducing personnel, thereby increasing the workload of remaining personnel; by reducing services offered (such as Housing Rehabilitation Coordination, Transportation Planning assistance and Comprehensive Planning assistance) and channeling resources (personnel and monies) to other priority areas; or by reducing both personnel and the quantity and quality of services. The prospect of employing any or all of these alternatives has been haunting BHJ since the late 1970's and early 1980's. Since the internship placement in 1981, the writer has learned, through follow-ups with the agency, that the pressure to use these alternatives still exists.

The problem that is discussed and analyzed is how would an organization reduce its activities and operating expenses without reducing them to the point of threatening the existence of the organization itself. Put simply, can an organization manage significant cutbacks, yet retain a credible level of service delivery?

The writer addresses this problem within the context of a discussion on BHJ as a case-study and reveals a solution that was adopted by the organization.
III. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Rationale for Regional Commissions

First, it seems appropriate to discuss the justification for regional commissions. Regional commissions evolved from the Johnson "Great Society" era. It was noted that geographical regions in the United States were easily identifiable by particular problems or characteristics. These problems transcended state borders and constitutionally defined levels of government. Regional planning commissions were seen as an answer to the problems of coordinating programs or services that would benefit an area.

In reviewing the book, Community and Regional Planning, by Melvin R. Levin, it was easy to understand the thoughts and philosophies on regional planning commissions. At the time the book was published (1969), the decision had just been made to create statutory metropolitan regional planning agencies throughout the nation. These came into existence for the purpose of approving public transportation grants. (The federal government required them as a prerequisite for approving the grants.) Soon after, these same agencies took on another responsibility: becoming comprehensive planning agencies. Areas wishing to receive funds for sewerage and water systems had to have a qualifying regional planning agency to represent
their interests.² Senator Edmund Muskie and the Advisory Commission and Intergovernmental Relations felt that if successful in their purpose, all federal capital grants in metropolitan areas would eventually be subject to mandatory referral to such agencies for review and advisory comment.³

Methods of Comprehensive Planning

It is interesting to note that the idea of metropolitan regional planning did not originate at the grass-roots level, but with planners, public administrators and federal officials, and congressional leaders who listened to them.⁴ If one would think a moment, the justification for this would become clear. Before these planning agencies existed, federal agencies, officials and administrators dealt directly with applications from thousands of local and state governments throughout the country. Requests for sanitation systems, highway repair and the like may come from neighboring jurisdictions. This tended to create duplications or inefficiencies in service delivery and were handled on an individual basis rather than on an area-wide basis. Gaps in services also occurred. For instance, if one locality received a new sewerage system, that system may end at a corporation line rather than be extended into the next locality. The neighboring locality may have badly needed the system but its funding may not have been approved. The results could

²Ibid. p. 127.
³Ibid.
be the extension of the system that would take place over the space of several years, whereas coordination between two localities would have resulted in a needed system being constructed for two localities at one time.

Comprehensive planning agencies can correct these inefficiencies and fill the need for coordination simultaneously. These agencies could provide planning that would facilitate the receipt of federal monies for projects that would benefit a large area, thereby transcending local government boundaries. The desired result, which reflects the thinking of legislative architects, is a layer of government bureaucracy that reviews the needs of several local governments and communities and communicating those needs in the form of organized applications for services and funds that would benefit an entire region.

Methods of Comprehensive Planning

Now that we have reviewed the philosophy and rationale behind the creation of metropolitan regional planning agencies, there are four methods of achieving the comprehensive side of planning. They are:

1. Independent/"Floating" Approach
2. Transportation Planning Approach
3. Metropolitan Review Approach
4. Metropolitan Government Approach

The first two approaches are very similar in methodology and style. The Independent/"Floating" Approach calls for research, education and persuasion. Agencies using this approach sponsor or perform valuable research for decision-
makers. A problem for agencies in employing this method is that they are usually field agencies which are called upon to supply data to a regional or national office. Because of their distance from power centers, these types of planning agencies are limited to educating and persuading those in decision-making positions. They are also considered transitional entities in lean economically down years whose future status, if continued is likely to be restricted to problem-raising and technical criticism.

The Transportation Planning Approach shares two characteristics with the Independent/"Floating" Approach in that this method does not call for ways to directly influence those in powerful decision-making positions, and that the purpose of this method is to educate and lend technical assistance where applicable. Transportation Planning type agencies have been particularly disappointing. The participation of local officials in identifying the needs of their respective communities have been "less the adequate." Consequently, transportation planning agencies become, in reality, highway planning organizations.5

A third approach to developing comprehensive planning agencies is the Metropolitan Review Approach. Here the planning agency has coordinating powers. Statutory law provides agencies with the authority to review and comment on grant-in-aid applications in major facility programs such as airports, hospitals, highways, etc. This type of agency often evolves

5Ibid.
into a forum for competing alternatives. The planner in this setting serves as "shrinker" to a region's conscience. This type of agency is careful to avoid "ticklish" issues.6

A key weakness to the Metropolitan Review Approach is that although it is stronger than the Independent/"Floating" Approach and the Transportation Planning Approach, it still does not call for a governing body. Agencies adopting this approach do not have strong chief executives who could over-ride contenders and force resolution to disagreements on area/regional priorities or concerns. A successful approach or method to solving a power problem would be to establish a single-purpose functional organization to handle metro-wide functions.7

A fourth and ideal approach to comprehensive planning is a Metropolitan Government approach. Here the agency becomes a "strong protagonist". The chief executive is an elected official with an identifiable base of support. This approach provides the planning commission with the power not only to raise consciousness on regional needs or provide technical expertise on grant applications or other areas, but also to command a course of action that would meet those needs.8

The main argument for regional organizations is that they are needed to respond to the problem of "scale" that arises

6Ibid.
7Ibid.
8Ibid.
when functions spill over state boundaries. Or, more clearly, regional organizations can solve regionwide problems without nationwide action. Another, perhaps more fitting, argument for regional commissions is that as an independent coordinator, the commission can define regional goals for other (local) organizations to pursue. The role of the commission is then viewed as that of a "catalyst".9

Turning from the general discussion of regional planning commissions, it is timely to focus on the problems of management cutbacks, which most recently has been brought on by reduction in finance allocation by the federal government.

The United States government has been experiencing the dilemma of scarcity of resources. From the late 1970's to the present, the federal government has squarely faced the reality that deficit spending must be brought under control. To accomplish this, organizations, lower levels of governments and agencies depending on funds from the federal government, have been firmly told that cutbacks in monies (and consequently activities and services) are necessary to fight the threat of larger deficits. The austerity program, imposed by the President of the United States, has forced public managers and administrators to deal with cutbacks in budgets, programs and personnel.

Cutback Management

"Cutback Management" is a term describing the technique of running an organization during periods of reduced funding and/or support. Cutback management means managing organizational changes toward lower levels of resource consumption and organizational activity. As in any technique or solution, there certain paradoxes or dilemmas that must be dealt with. Charles H. Levin in his book, Managing Fiscal Stress, has pointed to a number of problems brought on by fiscal stress.

The first is the "Paradox of Irreducible Wholes". In this instance, one may find a large system or network of organizations working as a single unit. To reduce one aspect of the system (or eliminate a subsystem) is to cause changes throughout the entire unit. An example of this paradox would be the criminal justice system. Courts, police departments, correctional institutions and parole systems are intertwined to such a degree that a reduction in any one of these areas would result in hardships to the remaining systems.

Another problem is the "Management Science Paradox." Organizations which rely heavily on information or computer analysts, software and hardware are constantly faced with promises of better opportunities. During a period of financial and/or activity reduction, a freeze is first imposed prohibit-


11 Ibid.
ing organizations from replacing top analysts. When actual cutbacks take place, the remaining analytical staff is eliminated in order to avoid cuts in direct service personnel. Public agencies are constantly in competition with private industry when trying to attract topnotch specialists in this field. Many times analysts will go to public agencies with the intention of waiting for the first private-industry position that offers more money and better benefits.

The "Free Exiter" problem deals with an organization's inability to design a mechanism for rewarding employees who remain with it through prosperous and difficult times. A free-exiter is one who shares in the "goods" of an organization and contributes very little towards its growth. In "down" or difficult times, these employees are skillful in avoiding sacrifices or, because of market demand for their skills, able to leave and secure positions elsewhere. During times of cutback, management may be unable to clearly separate free-exiters from committed employees and may be forced to cut back on those loyal employees whose skills are not in high demand for the sake of running an organization at a reduced operating level. Medical and mental health agencies are prime environments for free exiters. Professionals who are not satisfied with money or benefits may elect to barter for better working conditions in exchange for remaining with the

\[\text{12 Ibid.}\]

\[\text{13 Ibid.}\]
organization. If that is not feasible, they may join other agencies which fulfill their expectations.

The "Tooth Fairy Syndrome" takes place when calls for cutbacks go unheeded. In any organizational setting, people, upon hearing rumors of cutbacks, usually take little stock that such rumors are true. Consequently, when management calls on personnel for ideas on cutbacks, it is met with resistance and lack of belief in its intent or motives. The preferred tactic is to wait for someone else (usually a third party) to work out a plan for reduction.\(^{14}\) A form of this took place during the latter part of former President Jimmy Carter's administration and the early part of President Ronald Reagan's term. President Carter had called for agencies to develop ways to reduce expenditures and increase efficiency. This went largely unheeded. When President Reagan came to office, reductions took place across-the-board.

The "Participation Paradox" encourages participation by affected parties. These participants usually develop defensive or protective attitudes and these attitudes result in no plausible suggestion for cutbacks. Management would then implement an across-the-board cut.\(^{15}\) This paradox is similar to the "Tooth Fairy Syndrome". A difference is that rather than ask for suggestions for cutbacks, a directive may come from a region or federal head calling for the systematic or

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
immediate cutbacks. It is widely known that when President Reagan came to office, he recruited for a Secretary of Education who would head and dismantle the agency. Since that time, the agency's Secretary has not come up with a plan to dissolve the agency. It is possible that once acquainted with the workings of the department, the Secretary may have developed a "protective attitude" toward the organization.

Some organizations may institute plans to deal with cutbacks and attrition on a multiyear basis. This ideal maneuver for dealing with anticipated organizational reduction faces a problem in that principal management members may not be around to carry out the plan. New management members may arrive and elect not to abide by such agreements. This exemplifies the author's concept of the "Forgotten Deal Paradox."

The last three problems an organization may face during periods of reduction are the "Productivity Paradox", the "Efficiency Paradox", and the "Mandate Without Money Dilemma". These three dilemmas actually bring to the fore the crux of the problem of cutback management: how does an organization increase productivity and efficiency and carry out mandates in the face of budget cuts?

Increasing productivity usually requires investing funds in personnel training and equipment. In a cutback situation, management cannot justify the argument of spending money to save money by means of laying off employees or failing to fill

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16 Ibid.
vacancies. Similarly, in the situation of increasing efficiency, the ideal philosophy is that inefficient, poorly-managed agencies are easier to cut back than efficient well-managed ones. But efficient organizations suffer in that the savings they produce are used to aid poorly-run agencies. There is no incentive to develop efficiency measures. Closely related to this paradox is the mandate either from legislative acts or court orders ordering organizations to carry out certain activities. Organizations are faced with failing to carry out mandates due to lack of funds. When such occasions arise, organizations are faced with the problem of finding funds. Again, this may lead to cutbacks in personnel or activities in order to achieve this.17

Once a decision has been reached that reduction in personnel is necessary to reach a lower level of activity, organizations may choose to recoup funds by lay-offs or by use of attrition. Robert McKersie's article on "Reduction is Force: Cost Effectiveness of Alternative Strategies", discusses the pros and cons of each strategy. In his opinion attrition is the most cost effective way to reach a savings on salary expense without sacrificing morale, loss of productivity, or efficiency. For instance, reduction of personnel by attrition does not put the organization in a "bad guy" position that lay-offs may create. Those employees who leave the agency do so from the

17Ibid.
results of private decision-making. The organization is not blamed for unwelcomed changes in an employee's life.\textsuperscript{18}

Another way to look at the benefits of attrition is to look at the components in the cost of lay-offs. Lay-offs do not simply curtail salary expenses; it bears certain economic, social and political costs as well. Economically, lay offs (or the threat of such) may lead to job insecurity among remaining employees leading to loss of productivity. The same wage is being paid for less output of labor. State and federal governments lose out on income tax revenue as well. Socially, there has been studies on the relationship between a person's ability to hold a job and his/her self-esteem. Employees are likely to develop problems with alcohol as a result of losing (or the threat of losing) a job. Politically, elected officials, especially at the federal level may be blamed by their constituents for the rise in unemployment.\textsuperscript{19}

Many areas must be explored before an organization could employ a method of reducing an organization's budget and activity. It is important to keep overall objectives in mind when embarking upon a given course. The case study of the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission bears this out.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
IV. METHODOLOGY

In developing the ideas put forth in the theoretical discussion, the student selected those works (books, periodicals, papers) that support or reject the justification that regional planning commissions are valuable coordinating and/or facilitating government entities. The other side of the coin is also presented: that is for all the good these types of agencies may accomplish, there comes a time when lack of funds, change in political attitudes or redefinition of goals and objectives may call for cutbacks in operations.

The data used to discuss cutback management have several sources. The primary sources are notes made during the internship at BHJ and information from the organization's executive director. The other primary sources come from practitioners in the fields of manpower planning or "staff control" management. One practitioner comes from the private sector and the other from the public sector.

Heavy reliance is placed on this information because these practitioners have specialized spheres of observation, i.e. cutback management is their area of expertise. They have years of experience in their respective fields. They have historical information regarding cutback management and the techniques they have employed in the past. Lastly, as practitioners,
they are exposed to new trends and techniques as well as modifications of present and time-tested cutback philosophies.

There is a danger in using this type of information, though. One must remember that the views of the practitioners, though substantiated by records and experience, are theirs; their personalities, opinions and emotions enter into how they perceive things. They are not "outsiders" observing the cycles of their organizations; they are a part of their respective organizations and part of the decision-making process in deciding how to use cutback techniques.

The methods of research employed in this project paper is the Descriptive/Analysis Method. This was chosen over the Historical Method and the Experimental Method. The Historical Method was rejected because it called for actually writing history which entailed recognizing "problems or organizational materials, general philosophies and more specific schools of historical interpretation, and such detailed processes of historical writing as historical perspectives and causations". This method seeks to relate historical events and the impact these events had on a society. This does not fit the goal of this paper which is to key into a particular organizational problem, not the impact of the problem on a specific society.

The Experimental Method takes the approach of identifying essential factors or variables in a system and controlling

all but one of these elements. This single variable is "manipulated or changed with a view to determining and measuring the effect of its operation".²¹ Although this writer identifies the situation creating a cutback management episode in BHJ and the effects of this on operations, the paper looks at a phase in the organizational cycle, not changing variables and recording their effects on the organization.

The Descriptive/Analysis Method is the primary method chosen for three reasons:

1. It allows the presentation of concepts in the discussion of regional planning commissions and cutback management.

2. It allows the presentation of the situation where cutback management was used in BHJ.

3. It allows the presentation of the change in BHJ's organizational structure as a result of the use of cutback management.²²

The presentation of the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission as a case-study supports theorists' ideas on regional planning commissions and the role of cutback management during an organization's "down" cycle.

²¹Ibid. p. 689.
²²Ibid. p. 299.
V. ANALYSIS

Structure

Brooke and Hancock Counties in West Virginia and Jefferson County in Ohio share some similar characteristics and problems unique to their area. All three are along the Ohio River; all three are steel mill communities; and all three are bound together by a road and transportation system connecting the large cities in Ohio to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Recognizing the need to have a coordinating body to address the needs common to the three counties, these counties passed resolutions in their respective legislative bodies and in 1969 created the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Regional Commission.

The Commission had eight areas of responsibility, covering activities from area-wide planning to intergovernmental and private agency cooperation. They included:

1. Providing and maintaining, as a united area-wide body, plans and programs for the orderly development of the region;

2. Effecting and maintaining sound public policies in residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, cultural, and other land utilization activities;

3. Expanding efforts at all levels of government for the planning and implementation of transportation routes and facilities;
4. Making available to officially designated authorities and other agencies approved by the Executive Committee, past, current and projected information and analysis on the economic, social and physical characteristics of the region;

5. Coordinating and developing plans and/or policy for utility production, and air and water conservation programs;

6. Furthering intergovernmental and private agency cooperation in the region and maintaining a library of planning reports and studies, area-wide for public use;

7. Expressing metropolitan development policy in the preparation and maintenance of long-range comprehensive plans, and other reports which serve as development policy guides for the region and all the municipalities. (The formation of these plans and reports would be coordinated with officially adopted municipal plans and ordinances.)

8. Representing the metropolitan areas in matters pertaining to federal and state fund applications and reviews for public projects, and providing the public current information affecting the area.23

The BHJ Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission is broken down into several internal layers in order to carry out the responsibilities outlined above. The entire Commission is charged with the duty of exercising policy and decision-making authority; the Executive Committee has administrative oversight in financial, personnel and operational affairs; and the BHJ staff actually carries out the mandates of the Commission and the Executive Committee. The Staff organization

will be broken down in the analysis of its activities and services. 24

"The BHJ Commission consists of the County Commissioners of the three-county region, the mayors of each of the region's municipalities and city (or town) council representatives from the larger incorporated municipalities, and a selection of smaller municipalities. The Chairpersons of the county and municipal planning commissions are members as well as twelve citizen/community representatives, three each from Brooke and Hancock Counties, and six from Jefferson County." 25 Jefferson County is allotted twice as many citizen members because the population of Jefferson County (over 91,000) more than equals the combined populations for Brooke and Hancock Counties (71,535). 26

The entire Commission proved unwieldy in dealing with the day-to-day function of the organization. In response to this problem, the Executive Commission was formed. It consisted of the County Commissioners, the Commission Chairperson and Commission members appointed by the Chairman based on per capita representation throughout the Region.

Financial Support

The BHJ Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission has financial support from three types of fundings: assessments, 

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. p. 3-7.
grants and service contracts. Each member government of
the Commission is assessed according to the size of government
and the size of the population it serves. For example, Steu-
benville, Ohio and Weirton, West Virginia, being the largest
municipal governments in the Region, are assessed at a higher
rate than the smaller city governments.27

Several state and federal agencies provide grant monies
for specific projects or programs operated or coordinated by
BHJ. Principal grant sources are the Federal Highway Admini-
stration, the Urban Mass Transit Administration, the Depart-
ment of Housing and Urban Development and the Appalachia
Regional Commission.

BHJ also obtains funds for requested services from member
governments. With the wealth of information housed in the
Commission's Staff Library and the skills, expertise and experi-
ence found in the Staff, the organization has the tools with
which to enter into service contracts with municipalities,
county governments and local agencies. For example, a member
government requested that the BHJ Director and Bookkeeper/
Accountant aid the city manager and bookkeeper in modernizing
its payroll system and suggested a saving or investment plan
for future projects.

In sum the three types of financing are used for different
phases of operations. The funds from assessments are used to
cover general operating expenses such as staff offices,

supplies and utilities. Monies from state and federal agencies are used to cover region projects and related administrative/support expenses. Finally, special services to member governments are covered by an agreed-upon contracted sum.

The BHJ Staff

During the internship, the organization of the BHJ Staff consisted of thirteen people - ten in the Ohio Office and three in the West Virginia Office. The Ohio Office was the headquarters for administrative direction and support to line staff and the West Virginia Office. The organizational structure and reporting relationships were unusual in that some staff members worked across state and county lines while others served primarily one county.

The Executive Director provided leadership to both offices. His duties included overseeing all staff operations as well as representing BHJ in community and inter-agency meetings. He also reported on the state of operations to the Commission's Executive Committee and full Commission.

Several key staff people reported to the Executive Director. They included the Administrative Assistant, the Transportation Director, the Ohio Office Principal Planner, the West Virginia Principal Planner and Housing Rehabilitation Coordinator. These people differed, not only in duties, but also in the number of employees reporting to them. Some were one-person sections, others had two-five subordinates.
The Administrative Assistant played a dual role as assistant to the Executive Director and head of the support staff. Reporting to her were the Comprehensive Planning Secretary, the Transportation Planning Secretary, Accountant/Bookkeeper and a Secretarial Trainee. The Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Planning secretaries did work for their respective sections, while the bookkeeper took care of all bookkeeping, accounting and financial reporting duties. The Secretary/Receptionist and Secretarial Trainee assisted in all clerical areas as needed.

The Transportation Planning Director was responsible for projects leading to the improvement of movement within Jefferson County and along the Ohio/West Virginia border. His main focus was in highway networks in the region. He worked with the BHJ Transportation Study Committee and the Ohio Department of Transportation in formulating plans for handling present and future problems in the region.

Reporting to the Transportation Planning Director were the Senior Transportation Planner and the Ridesharing Coordinator. The Senior Transportation Planner focused on studies on the volume, flow and density of traffic throughout major transportation arteries in the region. The Ridesharing Coordinator was responsible for setting up ridesharing programs with businesses, companies and organizations in an attempt to relieve automobile congestion on the main thoroughfares. He also assisted the Senior Transportation Planner in studies as necessary.
The Ohio Office Comprehensive Planning Director had no subordinates, yet was responsible for nearly every aspect of public planning except transportation. This staff member was "charged with planning and program assistance in such areas as housing, economic development, health and energy." Since it was impossible to spearhead any one project in these areas without letting the other suffer, the Comprehensive Planner served primarily as an advisor to Jefferson County government and municipal governments and agencies, and as a communication link between them and the state and federal agencies.

The West Virginia personnel were in a unique position. Not only were they part of the BHJ Staff, they also served as the staff for the Brooke-Hancock Planning and Development Council. This council, also known as the Region XI Planning and Development Council, is part of a network of regional councils throughout West Virginia and serves as the local development district under Appalachia Regional Council guidelines.

Prior to the fall of 1981, the West Virginia Office was headed by the Region XI Projects Director. He reported directly to the Executive Director with the Principal Planner and the Housing Rehabilitation Coordinator reporting to him. Consequently, most duties of that office fell to the Principal Planner. This organizational change resulted in the Principal Planner and the Rehab Coordinator reporting to the Executive Director.

Ibid.
The West Virginia Office Principal Planner not only performed the administrative duties of representing BHJ, the BH Council and Region XI simultaneously, he was also responsible for coordinating the Regional Development Plan which is submitted annually to the West Virginia Governor's office. The Principal Planner provided technical assistance in grant writing and review for state and federal monies for community projects. He also attended county commissioner and town meetings to report on projects the projects office may have been working on for these governments.

The Housing Rehabilitation Coordinator worked specifically with low-income homeowners in areas designated by the Appalachian Regional Council as underprivileged areas. He coordinated a program (state and ARC funded) that aided homeowners who did not have the money to maintain the upkeep of their homes. His duties included:

1. Accepting applications from homeowners for assistance. Homeowners must live in certified underprivileged areas and their incomes must fall within state and federally approved guidelines.

2. Investigating and verifying applicants' information and the condition of the home.

3. Coordinating agreements between contractors, homeowners and the BH Office.

4. Keeping the costs of repairs limited to $6,500 per house.29

Both the Principal Planner and the Rehab Coordinator shared one secretary.

29 Interview with Kevin DeFebbo, BHJ Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission, Steubenville, Ohio, 8 October 1981.
Impending Cuts at BHJ

During 1982 BHJ experienced many "belt-tightening" changes due to the implementation or change in direction at the federal level. President Reagan came to office in 1981 with an eye on cutting government expenditures. He had made it plain that planning agencies were an expense that government could do without. He reasoned that an efficient organization incorporated planning as part of its functions and that agencies whose focus were to strictly plan and coordinate were redundant. To put his beliefs into actions, the President reduced expenditures for domestic spending and increased spending on national defense. How did that directly affect the BHJ Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission? Cutbacks were felt through the sources of Commission funding. The level of federal expenditures in domestic programs did not increase. The level of spending remained the same while inflation and high interest rates remained high. This resulted in smaller real funds for projects. There was a real decrease in funds for the Transportation Planning Section and difficulties were arising in the West Virginia Office Housing Rehabilitation program.

Another problem the Commission was facing in the funding area, was that of assessments. The BHJ Region had been experiencing hard economic times. The Region is a heavy steel-producing area. During the late 1970's and early 1980's the demand for steel had hit its lowest level ever in the history
of the industry. For the BHJ Region, it spelled recession. Unemployment was as high as 17% and no new industries were moving into the valley to offset the economic downturn.

The economic problems translated themselves into funding problems for BHJ. As mentioned before assessments of member governments depended on their size and their size depended on the amount of dollars flowing in from taxes. With high unemployment and cutbacks in business and industry, the tax revenues were falling off. This meant lower assessments for member governments. As assessments fell, funding for BHJ operations became tight.

The problem facing BHJ was how to maintain a viable, coordinating, technical staff in the wake of decreased funding. It was evident that cutbacks in operations would have to take place. But where?

The Executive Director reviewed all the programs, projects, personnel and cost in order to come up with a method of cutting expenses. The Transportation Planning section had seen a slowdown in activity. With unemployment increasing in the Region, the demand for Ridesharing information was down. Traffic studies and surveys were complete for the Route 22 Bypass Project on the Ohio side of the River and emphasis was being placed on upgrading the network of roads in Jefferson County. A major accomplishment by this section and the Executive Director was the creation of a regional transit authority which revived the old bus system in the Steubenville
area. This organization took the place of the old Steubenville Bus Company which went out of business the fall of 1981.

A review was made of the Comprehensive Planning Sections in both the Ohio and West Virginia offices. Both were one-person sections. Cutbacks would involve eliminating one or both of these positions. Since they carried out the bulk of the Staff's assignments in the areas of A-95's (grant review), technical assistance in organizing, planning and coordinating, and liaison work between federal/state agencies and BHJ governments, to eliminate either of these positions would lead to questioning the existence of the organization.

The Rehabilitation Coordinator has had great response for housing repair assistance in Hancock and Brooke Counties. However, most responses came from the Weirton, West Virginia area and its suburbs. The need for coordination was clearly evident. Program inquiries and applications continued to stream in while rehab projects in progress required constant supervision.

The Support Staff was somewhat dependent on work for the Transportation and Comprehensive Planning Sections in determining the workload. However, this section could look forward to setting aside five working days monthly in order to assist the Administrative Assistant and Accountant/Bookkeeper in preparing month-end reports, vouchers, statistics and Executive Committee minutes. At times, the clerical staff was called in to actively participate in Section projects. For example,
the Transportation Planning Secretary accompanied the Ride-sharing Coordinator and/or Senior Transportation Planner to observation points to record traffic volume statistics at different times of the day. The Support Staff had the flexibility to switch to different projects as deemed appropriate.

The following discussion provides three actual approaches to cutback management. They are BHJ, private sector, and public sector solutions.

**BHJ Solution**

The Executive Director was able to affect staff reductions in three ways: attrition, transfers and lay-offs. All three sections, Transportation Planning, Comprehensive Planning and Support Staff, experienced losses. Both Ohio and West Virginia offices lost personnel, also.

The Transportation Planning section saw a slowdown in activity, as noted earlier. In response, the Ridesharing Coordinator had the foresight to see that with the loss of demand for his services in setting up ridesharing programs, it was just a matter of time before a cutback took place.

In preparing for this eventuality, the Ridesharing Coordinator had developed business contacts in the West Virginia counties in the area of printing. In the wake of staff reduction, he had successfully made the transition to a partnership in a printing company. Thus, reduction in staff by way of attrition.

The services of the Housing Rehabilitation Coordinator in the West Virginia office, on the other hand, had been in
high demand. More and more qualified citizens in the Weirton area were seeking housing rehabilitation aid and consequently, the need for service coordination was concentrated in the city with few calls coming from the outlying Brooke-Hancock county area.

The City of Weirton observed this demand for service and interpreted it as a message from a portion of its electorate. There was a clearly defined need for housing rehab aid and the demand for it was concentrated within city limits. Although the Appalachia Regional Commission contributed to the majority of operating funds for this area, Weirton also contributed in matching funds and was reaping the majority of the program benefits. The prime benefit was the satisfaction and pleasure of the citizens receiving aid, and the ability of the city to claim some credit since in contributed funds that helped made the funds available.

Weirton communicated to HBJ the wish to absorb the Rehabilitation program and its coordinator in its government. Its prevailing agruments were: 1.) the majority of the program's activities had already served the city's residents, 2.) the program could continue to serve the residents without the possibility of diverting time, services and money to an occasional project in either Brooke or Hancock counties, and 3.) the absorption of the program into the Weirton city government would aid BHJ in the problem of staff reduction. The third argument, or course, appealed to BHJ. (It is interesting to
note that the Mayor of Weirton was the immediate past President of the BHJ Commission and the former head of the Executive Committee. He was fully aware of the operational difficulties of the staff because of operating expenses, and was therefore able to make the attractive offer.)

The Executive Director, seeing the positive effects of the offer for both BHJ and the City of Weirton, gained assurances that the rights and benefits of his employee would not diminish as a result of this move. Once assured, the process took place where BHJ ended its participation in the Rehabilitation program and the City of Weirton added a new program to its list of services. Thus, reduction in staff and activity by way of a transfer from one government entity to another.

The final method of staff reduction utilized by the BHJ staff was layoffs. This was applied to the Support Staff section. The Transportation Planning Section staff reduction immediately translated itself into a loss for the need for the section secretary. The Secretary/Receptionist position was also eliminated since additional typing jobs no longer came from the Transportation Planning Section. As a result, the Support Staff Section was reduced from six to four. The Comprehensive Planning Secretary absorbed the duties of the Receptionist/Secretary position and this secretary along with the Secretarial Trainee took on any typing from the Transportation Planning Section. The Administrative Assistant continued to coordinate the activities of the section, while the Account-
ant/Bookkeeper continued with the bookkeeping, accounting and financial reporting duties.

The Executive Director was able to carry out the necessary reductions without any upheavals, conflicts or loss of morale and productivity for the reason of open communication and firm, above-board actions. He kept those Section Heads, who reported to him, abreast of the concerns and problems in meeting expenses while relating to them the Commission's and Executive Committee's predictions that cutbacks would be necessary at a future date. When the moment came to cut back staff and activities, there were no surprises. The Executive Director took firm actions, although those actions were aided by attrition and transfer of a program and personnel to another government entity. In the actual lay-offs, this leader informed his employees of the changes that were to take place. When possible, he assisted those staff members leaving the organization in making transitions into other public or private fields.

The cutback management employed by BHJ was in response to economic circumstances. Monies were declining and the organization had to adjust accordingly. Would other public or private organizations have reacted the same way? Probably. But for the moment, this writer would like to compare this situation with two organizations (one private, the other public) that use cutback management as a normal course of business.
A Private Sector Solution

Orkin Exterminating Company is a service oriented company with home offices in Atlanta, Georgia. This company specializes in insect and pest control with over 300 locations nationwide. This organization was chosen for this comparison because it provides a service to citizens and its success and profits depend on how well these services are delivered to their customers.

Tom Diederich, National Service Director of Orkin has been with the company for eight years. He has seen three "down" cycles during his tenure there. When asked how did his organization reduce staff and curtail activities, he was able to outline the following steps:

1. Begin with the most recent performance appraisals. How well or poorly an employee did his/her job during the past year determined where he/she stood in regards to who would be laid-off first. The higher the performance score, the less likelihood a particular employee would be laid-off. In cases where performance scores are close for any number of employees, those with less seniority would be laid off first.

2. Review duty manuals and job descriptions to determine which positions were necessary for the continuation of operations. This includes weighing each activity using a cost/benefit analysis. Those activities with the least cost and highest benefits were continued. Consequently, employees occupying positions which performed those vital activities, would have a lower risk of being laid-off.

3. Decide who to cut. Those activities that could be reassigned to other positions were done so and those employees who did not perform the reassigned activity would be terminated. What is important in this step is
that decisions are communicated to subordinates as to what is vital for operations, who can do them, and who picks up the slack. 30

Mr. Diederich noted that although cutback decisions are made in order to protect the "bottom line" (profits), employees must be made to feel that they are an important ingredient to the success of the company. When employing cutback management, managers are responsible for doing what is necessary to reduce costs while allaying fears and keeping up morale. Employees feel better about cutbacks as long as communications are open and fairness is used in deciding who is to leave the organization.

A Public Sector Solution

The Partnership of Business and Education, Inc. is a consulting firm that works closely with the Atlanta School Board. Based in Atlanta, this organization acts as a facilitator in bringing the business and education communities together. Business leaders articulate their needs insofar as the type of skills their organizations require from its potential employees to educators. Educators respond by suggesting the types of programs that must be developed in order to meet these needs. Together, business leaders and educators work to determine how those needs can be met. This organization was chosen for this comparison because it has worked closely with the Atlanta Board of Education in developing cutback

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30 Interview with Tom Diederich, Orkin Exterminating Company, Atlanta, Georgia, 16 May 1983.
strategies for this city's school system.

Dr. Boyd Odom, Executive Director of Partnership in Business and Education, has been in the field of cutback management for eleven years. Not only has he developed cutback strategies for the Atlanta School System, but he has written other such programs throughout the South and the U.S. Government. When asked how the Atlanta Board of Education implements cutbacks, he related the following steps:

1. Identify those programs which fulfill fewer educational needs than others.

2. Eliminate those programs. Those employees with the least seniority are released immediately.

3. Transfer remaining employees to other programs. Again, those employees with less seniority than those transferring into the program are let go.31

The above steps outline cutbacks using seniority as a deciding factor as to who to let go. This is no accident. Agreements between the local teachers union and the school board call for the use of a seniority system when laying off members of the profession.

During the late 1970's and early 1980's the Atlanta School System experienced a drop in enrollment due to reduced birthrate and outmigration to the suburbs. (Outmigration means that taxpayers with school-age children move to outlying suburbs and consequently pay taxes to support suburban commu-

31Interview with Dr. Boyd Odom, Partnership in Business and Education, Atlanta, Georgia, 22 June 1983.
nities and schools. This translates into a decline in enrollment and revenues for the support of the city schools.) This resulted in too many teachers for a lower level of student enrollment and money shortages. To remedy this, the seniority system was used to determine cutbacks in personnel.

About four years ago, the Partnership submitted a plan to the school board where cutbacks would be based on performance scores. The plan called for assessment teams (made up of employees in the school system) which would appraise employees who could be laid-off. The team's job would be to determine who performed most effectively and could be absorbed into another program in the system. The plan also provided for a laid-off employee's right to request a performance assessment by a team of his/her peers as a way of appealing the original performance assessment. The entire plan was scrapped, however when newly elected board members joined forces with existing board members who opposed the plan and voted to nullify the prior board's decision to institute reduction by performance assessment.

Dr. Odom expressed the opinion that the present issue is not cutbacks per se, but retraining. Today's workforce must submit to retraining periodically in order to meet changing demands for skills and knowledge. A decline in a particular organization or services does not simply mean a loss of demand for them, it means an increase in demand in another area. If one is to be valuable in the work force, it is necessary for one to constantly upgrade or enhance one's skills and expertise with retraining and/or refresher courses.
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The writer reviewed the use of cutback management in BHJ and realized that two of the three types of cutbacks (attrition and transfer) were actually courses of events that took place independently of any moves the organization would have made. In a word, the organization was able to play a passive role while events solved part of the task of cutting staff and activities.

The writer agrees with the Executive Director's use of layoffs. He was faced with immediately remedying the problem of staff expense and cutting personnel in order to lighten the agency's financial burden. But the writer believes actions with long-term results were also necessary. An organization can continue to cut personnel in order to save money to the point that mounting work loads on remaining employees may discourage or dampen employee morale and consequently cause turnover to rise.

This writer wishes to put forth four recommendations for cutbacks in BHJ. They are:

1. Removal of the West Virginia Office Secretary and hiring of an answering service which would take calls while the Comprehensive Planner was away for the office.

2. Removal of the Secretarial Trainee in the Ohio office and use the salary payable to this position to install word processing and/or office computer equipment.
3. Incorporation of the use of temporary typing services.

4. Development of contracts or agreements with local colleges and universities which would establish internship programs in both offices.

The activity in the West Virginia Office had dropped to the point that only those duties performed by the Comprehensive Planner were notably advisory in nature. The Comprehensive Planner worked primarily outside the office. He was consultant, advisor and facilitator when aiding county and municipal governments in applying for federal monies for qualifying local projects. The only other activity where this employee needed the support of a secretary was in the development of the Regional Development Plan. Although the West Virginia office secretary handled daily mail and typing jobs as assigned, she was actually a receptionist who kept the office open should someone visit the office.

An answering service is suggested in order to curtail the expense of a secretary who is not being used to her fullest capacity. Typing jobs could be delegated to the Ohio Office Support Staff or a temporary secretary.

The second recommendation is to remove the Secretarial Trainee in the Ohio Office and install word processing and/or office computer equipment. The use of this equipment would aid in efficiently and quickly accomplishing several task that would normally take more personnel than BHJ can afford to bring in. The word processor would aid the Support Staff in
getting out correspondence, reports and meeting minutes accurately and in less time than it would take to do the same jobs manually. The Comprehensive Planning Secretary could be trained to operate this piece of equipment. If this person were unwilling, replace that employee with someone who is proficient in the word processing field and could serve as Secretary/Receptionist as well.

The computer equipment could be utilized to aid the Transportation Planners in developing strategy to ease traffic congestion in the Region; it could be utilized in the Transportation and Comprehensive Planning Sections in developing statistics and analyses of the Region's problems; or lastly, it could aid the Accountant/Bookkeeper in keeping accurate payroll and expense records and cutting down auditing time.

The third recommendation is to hire a temporary typing service should the need arise in either the Ohio or West Virginia offices. Yearly reports or special project typing (not part of the established routine), could be delegated to such a service. The use of temporary employees would aid the organization in controlling payroll and fringe benefits expenses since these costs would be shifted back to the temporary service providing the typists.

Lastly, BHJ could develop contracts or agreements with local colleges and universities and provide internship placements for students. Students from several disciplines (public administration, engineering, political science, economics, mathematics, etc.) would be valuable aid for the Comprehensive
Planning sections in both offices. By assigning research projects to carefully screened, self-motivated students, the Comprehensive Planners would be free to initiate, develop or implement planning programs in several other areas of public planning which would benefit the Region. The Comprehensive Planning Sections could expand activities in unprecedented proportions.

Conclusion

There is every indication that should a conservative attitude continue at the federal level, planning agencies such as BEJ will continue to experience belt-tightening in the area of program and personnel costs, if not threatened with their very existence. If they are to survive, it is important that they be flexible and adaptive in regards to getting the most output from scarce input resources. This means that in order to survive and continue to serve citizens, organizations must develop efficiency and a capacity to expand services if they are to continue to be seen as organizations of significant value.

As in any cycle either in public or private organizations, every "high" period is followed by a "low" one. The wise strategic organization uses the "low" as a retrenchment and preparation period for the next "high". The Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission is experiencing a low period at present. It is important for its existence that it makes itself more visible and valuable now
so that when political winds change and blow favorably in its direction, it will be ready to take on new challenges and greater opportunities, and reap greater rewards.
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