

THE MYTHOLOGY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Remarks by

Hugh D. Galusha, Jr.

President

Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

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There is a mixture of personal and professional conviction that I think I share with most of you, that there must be a better way to bring about economic development than those practiced by most communities. It is this that establishes the justification for this conference.

Saul Alinsky has said the place to start is the way things are. Alas, we almost never do. The American dream of a limitless horizon has been a powerful stimulant; administered indiscriminately with cries of think big! It was important to the physical expansion of this country. If a man didn't like the town where he happened to be, he could go start one of his own at the end of the railroad. There was physical room, there was economic room, there was cultural room, to accommodate all.

Waste of space in any of the three senses was not important because the garbage didn't get in anyone's way. Whether it was an abandoned townsite with rotting buildings like those that still dot the northern great plains, the loss of capital and energy in the enterprises that failed, or the broken dreams of the homesteaders and their town counterparts, didn't really matter very much in the great upswelling of exuberance that propelled people across the United States.

Without that spirit it might be argued the country would not have been settled as fast, nor would its initial development been assured. It may well have been essential to have a blind irrational commitment to random growth. The worst of the excesses were ultimately cured when society started to catch up, and by filling in the gaps in the structure of our laws, we have attempted in a very rough way to direct the course of resource use - or at least to determine what those uses will not be.

But the dream still persists. John Smith, the owner of a hardware store and twenty vacant lots in Any-City, Montana, like his peers in Anywhere, Mississippi

or Vermont, still dreams of U. S. Steel, General Motors, and Lytton Industries all coming to town at once -- his store alive with new well heeled customers, and a subdivision on his lots. It is not likely to happen. It is not impossible, but the improbability is of the order of .00001%. And for good reasons -- reasons about equally divided between the large industrial corporation, for example, and Any-city.

Even communities with as large a spectrum of services as the Twin Cities find growth from the outside frustratingly unpredictable. For there are simply not enough major U. S. industries looking around for new plant locations to satisfy more than the remote probability I have assigned. I suspect that even if Any-city is the theoretical best location for Company A, the cost of finding Company A and then convincing its decision-makers, makes the exercise a terribly complicated one. Besides, the record of even major corporate management in unfailingly making the right decision in plant location is less than reassuring. Whims and personal objectives do play their part. Time and chance happeneth to them all.

Supporting this most durable of dreams are two others that seem opposite to each other, yet serve to mutually reinforce the central theme of a limitless horizon. The first of these involves a conviction that in some vague way there is a conspiracy which is directed against Any-city; which, like the log jam held by a key log, if it can be dislodged will release the pent-up desires of everyone to settle there.

The conspiracy syndrome in its broadest form is directed against the whole federal establishment from Congress to the Supreme Court; but it can also find scapegoats in the banking industry, the next town, the "Company" (by which is meant the principal corporate employer of the area, and the object of a love-hate that even Freud would be helpless to explain), tight money -- in fact, only the imagination of the chairman of the unsuccessful industrial development committee

limits the list. "If only they weren't against us!" is the identifying cry by which a sufferer from this affliction can be known.

The second is a curious perversion of the traditional American independence. This, too, has its identifying cry -- the hit song of a musical of a few years back put it very well -- "Anything you can do, I can do better." Unfortunately, in its sweeping application to our subject today, it isn't quite true. There are two areas I would like to single out.

The first flows from the extremely complicated society in which we now find ourselves living. I share the frustration of many of you that -- like you -- I must consult with experts in the various fields of my involvement. It is time consuming, and what's worse, they sometimes are impelled to tell me, respectfully but firmly, that I'm wrong -- that irrespective of the quality of my motives, my idea simply will not work. I take their advice grudgingly most of the time -- the times I don't, I nearly always regret. And for good reason.

In community planning it is not enough to be concerned -- to desire a result -- we have to know how to accomplish it. Education, public and private finance, city planning -- these are areas where technicians can be enormously useful. And they are available. State universities, public agencies, the major utility systems, have literature and people to help solve the technical problems of growth.

Sure, there must be motive power which only a concerned group of community leaders can supply -- but they need not try to invent the wheel, to use an apt if trite phrase. Success as a businessman or in a profession is not a freely transferable quality, outside the immediate areas of that success. To the contrary. It is a sad commentary perhaps on the requirements of our society that the total commitment of energy to a job, a practice, or a business required for success today usually results in a narrowing of skills rather than a widening.

Speaking as an ex-specialist in my old career of a CPA/lawyer, may I say a sense of restraint and humility in the technical aspects of somebody else's

occupation is hard to come by, especially if you are a specialist yourself, but it is a necessity if policy objectives are to be reached. Let me be sure I make myself clear; I am not suggesting an abdication of policy decision to the experts. Heaven forbid, Policy objectives -- or in the sense of our program today, community aspirations, are everyone's business. It's how a community goes about appraising these, once determined by the community itself, attaching price tags, and determining priorities that may require specialists. Fortunately, they are available, but curiously they often have to specially plead to get their services used.

The other manifestation of this dream is the assumption every community has an equal potential for growth in identical ways. This is not so. Obvious are the physical environmental differences -- rivers, harbors, mountains and plains.

Less obvious, but still part of the physical environment, are the alterations caused by the occupation of man -- the recognized limits of underground water reserves; pollution; and the patterns of exploitation of the natural resources in the trade territory. Least obvious, but as difficult to overcome as the others, are the differences in social structures and relationships. There are critical masses in economic growth, for example, which once attained by a community, tend to sustain continued growth without special directed efforts. The lead time of such a community is very difficult to overcome or even match.

Ninety-one principal urban areas have been identified for study in the Ninth Federal Reserve District (Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan) in the Upper Midwest economic studies conducted by the Upper Midwest Research and Development Council. In a soon-to-be-published updating of the original reports, Dr. John Borchert has analyzed the changes during the first six years of the sixties.

"Twenty-two of these ninety-one have accounted for 97% of the growth. The Twin Cities metropolitan area, with 24% of the District's population, accounted

for 70% of the growth of the urban areas studied. The data point to a continuing and accelerated concentration of the region's population in a small number of major urban areas. The trend had been running for three to four decades at the time of the 1960 census. UMES urban projections indicated that it would run even faster between 1960 and 1975; and, thus far, that is what appears to be happening."

"The reasons for this increasingly selective growth pattern are suggested by the functions which the fast-growth centers perform in the economy. The Twin Cities not only provide metropolitan services to the region, but also occupy a place in both the national economy and the popular image as one of America's major thriving cities. Of the other twenty-one fast-growth areas, fifteen have state colleges or universities. Three of those also have major military installations; and a sixteenth is a state capital. The few fast-growth places which do not have these substantial educational or other functions lie mainly in the southeastern part of the region, where most of the current and historical industrial growth is concentrated."

I started with the analogy of a critical mass. I don't want to belabor it, but it does appear that a pattern of growth, once established at a certain rate, tends to be a competitive factor in favor of that fortunate community. And this is particularly true, I suspect, if the growth has been sufficiently diversified to bring along a pool of entrepreneurs or risk-takers of increasing sophistication, plus a supply of the essential support services and skills -- progressive banks, tax attorneys, some scientific and engineering experts, and the rest of the infra-structure of a balanced community.

For Community A to look at Community B and assume that because they may be comparable in certain superficial ways, such as population size at a moment in time, they can be comparable in all ways, is a dangerous assumption. Communities are synergistic systems, to quote Buckminster Fuller -- the total community is often

a much different thing than the sum of its parts. Limits imposed by history, custom and use can confine development just as certainly as rivers, shores, and mountains. For examples, it is not necessary to leave the Twin Cities metropolitan area, which comprises some 107 incorporated communities. Many of these are peripheral towns that have gradually become bedroom enclaves.

For most of these, the possibilities of developing a balanced spectrum of community life are virtually nil. By taste, place of occupation, and interest, the inhabitants have little identification with their particular suburban community. There are only a limited number of things within the normal range of community interest holding them together, apart from the accident of residence within the incorporated limits of a legally denominated community. With the exception of a desire for good schools, these are usually negatives -- they are ordinarily in agreement on not wanting higher taxes, minority people, or smokestacks; in not knowing who their mayor is or even what form of government their community has.

It may be seriously questioned whether any pattern of internally organized community effort can alter the roles of most of these communities where the population mix is so heavily weighted toward the commuter, and the pattern of land use has become frozen. This does not mean such a community will not grow in population -- much less does it mean there should be any lessening of efforts to shape the future development of the community. But the options are of an entirely different order than those of a community not physically tributary to a major metropolitan center.

Although of a different order, the options are not much broader for the small town out in the district that is attempting to compete on an equal basis with a fully developed shopping center. The fact that a broad range of community activities and support services is available in the large center tends to pull people into Fargo, for example, from many miles away -- or Billings, Montana, to cite another. Medical services, homes for the aged, a range of entertainment services,

etc., are service magnets to draw people who then, while they are in the community, avail themselves of other community facilities, almost on an impulse basis. Small businesses everywhere are declining in number, and the decline is as rapid in the large cities as in the hamlets. The only difference is that the hamlet can less afford the loss.

A good example is provided by Dr. Borchert in his analysis of the change in number of business establishments by type of trade center. The loss between 1961 and 1967 throughout the Upper Midwest has been fairly uniform. While it varies in modest ways by category of activity, there has been a significant reduction in numbers wherever located. This suggests perhaps that a small community, instead of attempting to compete on all categories with the large competitor, should consciously elect to concentrate in a certain area of service.

An example would be a local health center, with a home for senior citizens and associated medical services. There are those retail businesses, though -- and I'm sure each of you have one in mind -- that have established service reputations so effectively that people travel considerable distances to shop, even though the community may have little else to offer.

A community of this sort that comes to my mind is Rudyard, Montana, where in a town of only a few hundred, an enterprising merchant has built a service center for rural customers which is effective in drawing people from considerable distances, even though they have as alternatives Havre, which is many times larger, or Great Falls, which is classed as a metro center.

In preparing this talk, I was reminded of a question-and-answer period following a panel discussion at the institute conducted by the bankers associations of Minnesota and the Dakotas on the Morris campus last year for small town bankers.

The discussion had been devoted to the banker's role in community development. A banker from a small town in western Minnesota said, "Mr. Galusha,

I've been here for a week listening to people tell me how I should run my bank and lead my community. I'm going to go to my office Monday morning a very confused and tired man. The first question I'm going to ask myself is 'Where and how do I start this new life?'"

I don't recall now the answer I gave him. I suspect it was designed more to comfort him than to inform -- given the pressures of the program and an uneasy chairman. A year later, this is my answer: I quoted Saul Alinsky a few minutes ago, who said the place to start is the way things are. It's a most useful phrase to remember. What are the realistic possibilities for growth of Any-city? This does not mean generalizations for the next town, but specifically for Any-city.

Given the resources -- human, financial and physical -- what are the aspirations of the community, or am I even sure what my own are for the town? People and communities should attempt to respond to their environment in terms of what they know is true, rather than what they want to believe. How few communities really have a very clear idea of what the citizenry want; even fewer have much of an idea of what their attainable alternatives are.

And almost none have thought realistically about the price tags -- the cost/benefit ratio of community action or inaction. Yet this kind of three-stage inquiry is essential for all communities, whether they be bedroom towns, rural communities or metropolitan centers. The inquiry has to be internally generated. There have been speakers beyond counting exhorting chambers of commerce up and down the land about "progress starts at home" -- and who, having finished their exhortation, leave on the next plane to arrive at their homes in time to attend a chamber dinner at which a similar message is delivered.

Generally, the results are identical in both communities -- a resolution espousing the principal, and a contribution of cash to the industrial development committee to finance a trip to another city where an attempt is to be made to

proselyte one of their industries. Seldom is there any discussion of the central issue: What kind of a community do we have now; and what is reasonably possible for it to become? It involves in a sense a probing of the spirit of the community to find out just how committed people are to living there and why. The bald fact is that if young people are moving out, it just may be this is related to why others are not moving in. It may be that the failure of spirit is contagious.

In its initial stages, the inquiry has to be kept as far ranging as is possible. There are not all that many people in any community articulate about their hopes for their town. It is much easier, especially in formal groups, to be negative and consume the meeting time with resolutions against federal spending and international bankers, neither of which accomplish anything, but make those in attendance feel they have accomplished something.

It really only takes one man to start, but absent that one, no external effort will be successful, no matter how much money is shipped in from outside. It's a pity - for once begun, it's not all that difficult to develop a discussion to a point where the options begin to emerge. It may be that some of the community aspirations have to be ruled out, however attractive they may have been, for one or more of the reasons mentioned earlier. Like the building plans scaled down during the design stage, when the reconciliation of dreams and dollars becomes impossible, a cutback on the scope of community planning before community commitment can be accomplished with no greater cost than an abandoned draft -- even though the piteous cries of the proponents of the abandoned plan are heartrending, indeed.

I mentioned the word "spirit." One of the most dangerous of the myths is that an increased industrial payroll can solve everything; that community development can be measured solely by smokestacks. "You get us the industry and we'll worry about the rest," was the statement I once heard from a developer. He ignored the fact that it had taken about \$11,000,000 of public and private money to repair the

damages of unplanned growth of another era in that same city. The quality of life in a particular city is the ultimate yardstick used by young people in deciding whether to stay or leave, or by the businessman who is looking for a place to grow - not only as the head of a business, but as the head of a family as well. This is an intangible - the feeling you get in some cities of vitality, concern for individuals, a pride in being there. It is manifest in a number of ways - informed courteous gas station attendants; good schools; clean streets; little league baseball; a symphony orchestra; good race relations.

To adopt the appealing shorthand of Charlie Brown, "cities are for living." Economic growth must support and be consistent with this objective. We are at the end of an era of unrestricted, unplanned industrial growth without regard to the humanistic values of the quality of life accompanying that growth. There are too many economic options for most Americans. Exhortation and community loyalty will not keep a young person in a town where he finds the quality of life deficient.

Those who talk wistfully of the American agrarian tradition, of the charms and pleasures of the quiet life in rural America and the small town, to high school and college graduating classes may be pleasing themselves and a few of their generation with their nostalgic yearnings for a less complicated world, but for most of their audience it is part of the dialog of the deaf. About all that can be said for such a subject is that it won't get the speaker into any trouble, which is more than can be said for fiscal restraint, tax increases, Vietnam, and the whole range of urban social and economic topics lumped loosely together under the heading of urban crisis.

Crisis is a bad word, incidentally; perhaps it too should be listed among the myths, for it connotes a single point in time, a few easily definable causes that can be cured for all time with massive applications of money and federal programs. You in this audience, probably more than most, recognize the fallacy in this. Cities are constantly evolving and it is with the accommodation of change

and the acceleration of its rate we must be concerned.

And in many communities this concern is emerging. The most encouraging part of this phenomenon is that it no longer is narrowly defined in terms of raw industrial data. How people live -- the number of options they have for housing, jobs, recreation, education -- is the direction of inquiry by businessmen as well as college professors.

This inquiry unfortunately is not being conducted in every city. I submit that here is the true correlation with economic growth. How broadly ranging is the internal inquiry? Who, and how many, are involved?

It has always been fashionable in the United States to attribute our national failures to national leadership. For most of us this eliminates any individual responsibility because we are a long way away from what we imagine to be the national decision making level on which the objects of our criticism operate. There have been blunders in national policy which can be laid to errors of judgment of just a few men at these rarified levels, but the failures of leadership at the state and local levels are not only more numerous, but in the aggregate more serious.

It is a paradox that while the conventional wisdom says that the processes of centralization have shifted the focus of power to change the quality of American life far away from the individual to a few locations in Washington or New York, the reality is that urbanization is working the opposite effect. I suspect we are witnessing the emergence of city states almost like ancient Greece. Anyone who is engaged in regional efforts is well aware, occasionally to his sorrow, of the rivalries and the sense of identity the metro areas are developing.

I realize that many of you represent state planning organizations, and what I am about to say may be disturbing, but I wonder about the future role of states in an urban society. I'm not suggesting their demise as political units, but I suspect their roles may be far different than they are now. The sense of identity,

the political creativity, that is developing internally within cities is working profound changes in the political structure of the United States. The role of the Federal Government is being subjected to the same competitive strain, and for the same reasons.

This is where the political, social and economic action is taking place and the chance to participate in the decision-making is as close as Main Street. It will be interesting to observe over the next few years what quality and quantity of leadership emerges, for here will be the testing of our national survival, I suspect; not Washington. It will not all be the largest cities either. The twenty-two cities in this District that accounted for 97% of the growth, as I mentioned earlier, are of various sizes and each sub-region is represented. No, the race is not closed, but the ground rules for entry are defined -- a sense of reality, a feeling of concern, a conviction that something can be done.