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Fall 2003

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Legislating Growth Management

Power, Politics, and Planning

Elisabeth M. Hamin

State-level growth management legislation involves a complex constellation of political support and opposition. This article uses narrative policy analysis techniques to examine the politics behind Iowa's late-1990s effort at such legislation, identifying a model of factors participants use in determining political support for a bill. While much of the debate in Iowa focused explicitly on the technical issues, at heart the issue was the redistribution of power the proposed policy entailed, along with its fit to a largely rural state culture. Passing growth management legislation will require greater attention by planners to both of these topics.

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Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 69, No. 4, Autumn 2003. © American Planning Association, Chicago, IL.

Much has been written about the need for state-level tools to improve local planning and the efficiency and effectiveness of various ones (e.g., Burby & May, 1997; Kelly, 1993; Nelson & Duncan, 1995; Porter, 1997; Urban Land Institute, 1998; Weitz, 1999). Through their Growing Smart initiative, the American Planning Association (APA) has undertaken an ambitious and largely successful effort to provide guidance for reform (APA, 1998). Still, in many states such reform is politically problematic, and proposed reforms have not met with legislative success. The question this poses is why legislation passes in some cases but not in others. I use Iowa as a case study to examine why a particular proposal has so far failed. The essence of the problem in Iowa, discussed below, was that there were no powerful groups strongly committed to passage of the bills. Narrative policy analysis, which explores the meanings of policies from the perspective of those involved with them, allows an understanding of why this was so.

Sprawl and Growth Management in Slowly Growing Regions

As of 2002, the drive to reform state-level land use law was strong across the United States. The APA (2002) reported that 12 of the 50 states had implemented moderate to substantial comprehensive planning reforms, another 10 were attempting to strengthen existing laws, and almost one third were pursuing their first major statewide planning reforms. This left just one quarter of the states inactive. The states that have undertaken reform are largely on the East and West Coasts, with the notable exceptions of Wisconsin, Vermont, and Tennessee, while the inactive states and those just beginning reforms comprise much of the geographic center of the country, generally the slowest growing regions (see Figure 1).

It could be argued that for many of the heartland states, growth management is not pressing because the population is growing at only modest rates. However, as reported by Fulton et al. (2001), metropolitan areas in the slower growing regions urbanize far more land per new resident than those

FIGURE 1. State land use law reform activity, 2002.

in fast growing regions. Thus, “metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest are consuming land at a much greater rate than they are adding population, and so their ‘marginal density’ is very low” (p. 1). In the Midwest, while population increased 7.1% from 1982 to 1997, urbanized land increased by 32.2%. To the extent that sprawl is defined by consumption of land beyond that needed to accommodate population growth, slow population growth does not mean there is no sprawl problem.

Much of the issue in the more rural states is not urban sprawl (low-density or leapfrog development within incorporated boundaries) but rural sprawl, the construction of homes outside of incorporated municipalities, typically in the countryside governed by counties. The reasons people choose to move outside of towns or cities are both economic and aesthetic. There is the desire to live in the country, surrounded by open vistas and nature or the middle landscape of agriculture. Perhaps more important motivations are the lower land

costs and property taxes. With gas prices low and an unabated willingness to drive, people can build expensive homes using county services while still accessing the benefits of nearby towns and cities. The impacts to the homeowner of the lower levels of services offered by counties, such as unplowed roads, volunteer fire departments, and lack of fire hydrants, may either not be apparent to a new arrival or may be worth the trade-off in costs and aesthetic amenities (Hamin & Benson, 2001).

While some may certainly debate whether rural sprawl constitutes a problem, it does have repercussions. Farming near subdivisions tends to be less profitable than in fully rural areas (Daniels & Bowers, 1997), working ecosystems become less functional through fracturing and resultant edge effects (Dramstad et al., 1996), fiscal expenditures are required for new infrastructure (Burchell, 1996), and energy and road use increase from extensive driving (Newman & Kenworthy, 1988). Thus, even in states where population growth is minimal, land consumption is increasing with attendant negative outcomes, suggesting that improved planning, often guided by state-level reform, is needed.

The Politics of State-Level Growth Management: A Historical Perspective

State-level growth management has been defined as providing for state participation in local growth control decision-making processes (Bollens, 1993; Bosselman & Callies, 1971); this may take the form of direct state action or requiring/enabling regional or local planning, sometimes matched to state goals (Nelson & Duncan, 1995).

First Wave

Efforts at state-level growth management are typically traced to the 1970s, the first wave of such regulatory reform (Bosselman & Callies, 1971; DeGrove, 1991). The politics of the first wave rested on the vigorous environmental movement of the time, with citizens distrusting local government to protect them from the negative outcomes of new development (DeGrove, 1991). Examining various land use reform efforts of the first wave, Popper (1981) found that support for land use reform came primarily from the urban middle class, planners, land use lawyers, and environmentalists. Opposition included landowners, homeowners, rural residents, and farmers concerned about property rights issues and their ability to profit from land speculation; developers and Chambers of Commerce; and building trades, who believed reform would reduce the level of construction

and thus affect profits and jobs. Occasionally, critics from the left of the political spectrum would dismiss growth management as a middle-class issue. Popper found that cities and towns tended to oppose any restrictions on home rule, and state agencies opposed the creation of another agency that would not be under their control.

Neither support nor opposition were uniform, however. Local landowners might support reform if they felt it would improve their property values or protect open space they liked. Some developers liked it, because they hoped it would either reduce permitting uncertainty through a clearer process or reduce overall permit approvals and thus decrease competition. Some towns liked it if they were already under growth pressure or if they hoped to shift responsibility for controversial land use decisions elsewhere. Generally, Democrats supported land use reform and Republicans opposed it, but there were exceptions. Democrats closely aligned with building trades might oppose reform, and Republicans who came from old money and were concerned with environmental quality might support it.

Second and Third Waves

The second wave of growth management legislation occurred mainly in the 1980s (Weitz, 1999). While the focus of the first wave was on environmental protection and state regulation of large developments, the emphasis of the second wave was on balancing economic development and environmental protection, requiring that infrastructure be available before permitting new development, and that affordable housing be provided (DeGrove, 1991).¹ Weitz (1999) found that a third wave of state-level growth management began in the 1990s, focusing on empowerment of municipal planning rather than requirements for local planning. In second and early third wave reform efforts, the line-up of support and opposition has remained similar to that of the first wave, as shown in the various examples provided by DeGrove (1992), with two significant changes. Business interests now often, although certainly not always, support reforms (Burchell et al., 2000).² Also, the geography of support and opposition has shifted. Older center cities have aligned with inner-ring suburbs to support growth management, while growing suburbs and edge cities oppose such reforms (Orfield, 1997). A key point to be made is that perhaps the most important proponent in most of these states was the governor, and that passing legislation without gubernatorial support is difficult (DeGrove, 1991, 1992; Salkin, 1999). The actual experience of support and opposition will vary based on a particular state's geography, economy, and social and political culture (Abbott, 1994), as well as on the specifics of

the legislation proposed. Nevertheless, there seems to be a fair degree of similarity across the cases included in the literature.

Defining a Trend

These findings and those of other authors reviewed above suggest a delineation of the forces at play in determining support for or opposition to state-level growth management. There are four main axes. First, and most commonly identified, is *political/economic interests*, such as those pitting homebuilders against environmentalists. A second axis involves *municipal geography*: The current pace of development in a municipality as compared to the larger region will likely affect its support for particular policies. A third is *party affiliation*: While this is a weaker indicator now than during the first wave of reform efforts, as further described below, Democratic versus Republican affiliation still is part of the calculus of support or opposition. A fourth axis is *institutional authority*: Land use reform reduces the scope of authority of some agencies or municipalities while increasing the influence of others. Within each of these axes there are complexities, and the actual position taken by a particular person or group will likely be influenced by several of them. Perhaps the most important elements complicating the picture are the particular values held by participants, which may or may not coincide with their axes-based positions. We can understand these values as forming the base within which individuals weigh their positional decisions. All of these decisions are contingent on the actual content of the particular legislation.

Method

The research approach I used for this study is *narrative policy analysis*. Briefly, narrative analysis argues that the meanings of a policy vary for both geographic and non-geographic communities, and that in order to understand the significance of that policy, one must deal not just with its technical aspects but also with the meanings that the policy carries for relevant communities. Thus, it asks that we listen closely to affected individuals and groups to understand a policy's values, metaphors, and connotations as they understand them (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Roe, 1994; Yanow, 2000).

There is also a participant-observer aspect to this research. I served on the Iowa State Commission on Urban Planning, Growth Management of Cities and Protection of Farmland, convened by the state legislature to draw up recommendations for action on growth management in Iowa.³ This activity began in 1997 and effectively concluded in late 1998. Most of the data for this article comes from a series of interviews I undertook with rele-

vant actors after the legislative effort had concluded and from a review of public testimonies given during hearings that preceded the crafting of the initial bill.⁴ I use quotes from these interviews to support my analysis but allow the individuals quoted to remain anonymous.

Case Study

The previous discussion describes typical successful recent efforts to pass state-level planning reform. The question to which we turn is how the experience is different in an unsuccessful effort, specifically that undertaken by the State of Iowa.

Iowa Background

From the 1970 to the 2000 census, Iowa experienced an increase of just under 101,000 new residents, for a 30-year net gain in population of 3.6%. Growth in the last decade has been more rapid, with an increase of 5.4% from 1990 to 2000 making up for a population decline of 4.7% during the farm crisis of the 1980s. The 1990s were the first decade in the 20th century during which the state had more in-migration than out-migration. The location of residents is shifting within this relatively stable climate, with population decreases in highly rural areas outside of towns, small-town stability, and migration of metropolitan populations from older urban cores to newer suburban or edge-city areas and beyond in corridors spreading into some rural areas of the state (Iowa State University Department of Sociology & Gowdy, 2001). Because of the fairly low population increases, little farmland is actually being lost to development; about 1% of the total agricultural land base, or 128,404 net acres over a 10-year period ending in 1997, moved into residential use (Iowa State University Extension, 1998). Of those net agricultural acres developed into residences, 106,889 (83%) were in unincorporated areas (Iowa State University Extension, 1998).⁵ Thus, much of the development in the state can be characterized as rural sprawl. The rate of population growth is far lower than the rate of urbanization of land in the metropolitan areas of Iowa, and densities are decreasing (Fulton et al., 2001). Land use planning is generally not valued very highly in Iowa, particularly at the municipal level, with many smaller towns and some counties having no zoning (Institute for Design Research and Outreach, 2000).

The Iowa legislature is a part-time body, meeting only January through May. Most members come to Des Moines for 3 or 4 days a week during the legislative session and return home to their other jobs on the other days. Given short election cycles, this means that each individual has very limited time to consider bills, and the

legislature as a whole has significant limitations on what can be accomplished in any given year.

The Legislative Process

Several elements came together in the mid 1990s to create initial interest in growth management in the state. First, there were several highly controversial involuntary annexation fights, where urban areas or edge cities attempted to incorporate fringe county land that was developing as rural residential. Similarly, there were a couple of high-profile uses of eminent domain to take farmland for either road building or industrial development. Residents fought these battles bitterly and with great publicity, and as a result, the issue of land use regulation was highlighted.

By 1996, a progressive urban legislator with a very safe seat,⁶ Representative Ed Fallon (D), had come to believe that the lack of state growth management legislation was harming not just fringe areas and farmland but also urban centers, where his constituency lived, through the out-migration of people and businesses. He pushed for new growth management legislation, and the House leadership gave him an unfunded Commission on Urban Planning, Growth Management of Cities and Protection of Farmland (the Commission), that began work in 1997. This Commission included 4 state legislators and 17 other members representing various key stakeholders and professions.⁷ It authored a consensus report, from which the initial legislation was developed. While the Commission report was being prepared and prior to the writing of any of the relevant bills, the legislators convened 10 formal public hearings across the state on land use, and most of the Commission members attended one or more of these hearings.

Legislative Initiatives

At the conclusion of the Commission's work in 1998, legislative aides drew up a bill, Senate Study Bill 1063 (SSB 1063), based loosely on the Commission's report but adding great detail regarding the processes of annexation and condemnation and in some respects significantly changing the report's recommendations. This was a very complex bill, 58 pages long. SSB1063 lacked sufficient support to reach the Senate floor. Instead, it was sent to the Local Government Committee (LGC). The LGC leadership believed SSB 1063 to be far too complicated and disagreed with many of its recommendations. So a subcommission of the LGC, led by a rural Republican, completely rewrote the bill as Senate File 2437 (SF 2437). Under the original proposal, cities and counties would have had to cooperate in preparing joint plans only for unincorporated lands that were targeted for development, and the state would have to develop an

explicit strategic plan and respect local plans when considering infrastructure investments. Under SF 2437, local commissions, made up primarily of county and city officials, would write a strategic development plan for the whole county, including the cities. The state would provide incentives to encourage cities and the county to match their zoning to those plans, but there was no required zoning, nor was there state review of county or local plans. Most controversially, the new bill provided that in involuntary annexations, the areas to be annexed were allowed to vote on whether to become part of the city.

At 25 pages, this new bill was still long but was much shorter than SB 1063. This new version strengthened the position of counties and rural residents vis-à-vis cities through both the joint planning process and the annexation changes. It did not require state investments to follow either a state strategic plan or local plans, and it also lacked funding for planning or zoning revisions—a significant problem, as providing funding for revisions has been shown to be key in effective state-level growth management (APA, 2002; Gale, 1992). The designated process of joint plan development was also quite complex. Thus, it had significant technical problems, but nevertheless represented a start toward land use reform.

Various groups developed other bills, but SF 2437 was the one with at least some political momentum, and so the discussion that follows deals largely with this bill. SF 2437 was never debated by the full Senate; instead, it moved to the Ways and Means Committee, from which it never resurfaced in the election year of 2000. Attempts to put forward legislation continued as of 2002, correcting some of the problems inherent in SF 2437 (Lozano, 2002), so the issue is still alive.

Party Politics

In this and the next few sections, I describe some of the key positions held by the groups that were most active in the Iowa state legislative debate from 1996 to 2000. As a project resulting in increased government oversight of the land market, it appears on its face that growth management would clearly be an issue supported mainly by Democrats. In Iowa, the process has not worked this way. Instead, Republicans have been central to the effort, along with some support from Democrats. It is worth listening to an extended explanation of this provided by one legislator:

I think in the final analysis it [land use reform] has Republican and Democrat implications to it. I think that as a Republican you are constantly trying to limit the centralized government structure, and this bill, we think, gives some power back to

the community. The Democrat, I believe, it is probably their issue to protect the little guy, and anytime they believe the little guy is being made to roll over, then they believe they have a case. The partisan struggle is that most Republicans right now in the legislature represent rural districts, and most urban areas right now are being represented by Democrats.

This legislator went on to suggest that while by ideology Republicans prefer to minimize government interventions in the market, the rural areas they tend to represent want protection from cities and sprawl. In contrast, Democrats generally might support government intervention, but for growth management, this becomes interpreted as inhibiting city economic development, which they oppose. In the end, as this legislator reported regarding his legislative colleagues, "For all of us, it provides a lot of conflicting emotions."

Interest Group Support

Other than the legislators who had taken an interest in the issue as described above, it was difficult to find any interest group that came out strongly in favor of any of the various bills proposed—and that was the essence of the bills' problem. As one observer noted:

I am not sure [the legislation] was stalled because of active opposition as much as it was because of a lack of active support. . . . I don't think there was ever any real consensus that was reached on, first of all, the need for the legislation and then what it should contain. I am not so sure that [the legislation] was killed; it just never came to life.

Counties. The counties came late to supporting any sort of growth management legislation. Largely this was an organizational issue; as a lobbyist for the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) noted, "We are a very bottom-up organization, and it really just takes this kind of collective action to get to that point. I don't presume to talk for [the counties] until they get to the point where they have decided something." A county administrator active in ISAC explained that the counties eventually supported the legislation because

It required joint city/county planning and it allowed the designation of these strategic [rural] growth areas, so it did not completely shut off growth in the unincorporated areas. [A plan] had to be jointly agreed upon by the cities and the counties. . . . It wouldn't impede a city's growth. [The legislation] wouldn't exclude rural nonfarm growth.

Regardless of the content of specific bills, support for state-level legislation appears to have been strongest among the counties bordering rapidly growing metropolitan areas. For example, a representative of Dallas County, which borders Des Moines, spoke at the Des Moines Commission hearing in favor of state-level growth management. This testimony reflected the County's frustration with having land annexed away, only to remain in agriculture in the incorporated area for a number of years. It also demonstrated the hope that more state involvement would help rationalize the process of land annexation and development.

Farm Bureau. The Farm Bureau's constituency lacks consensus around land use regulation. As one observer put it: "They are split between their two types of farmers, those who passionately want to protect the land, and those who want to protect their right to profit." Because of this, while the Farm Bureau eventually came to support the legislation, it was never with strong conviction. As described by a lobbyist for the Farm Bureau:

All individuals have different ideas about what they want to do with their property so we recognize the individual property rights and we need to preserve those as well. We also believe that there is a place for development . . . [in a] well planned way that makes sense both for the infrastructure that we have and some sort of balance. I don't think that people see it as mutually exclusive. . . . We want to see some change.

Interest Group Opposition

Key opponents were the League of Cities, some Chambers of Commerce, and the development lobbies. The cities themselves held more complex positions that varied based on their particular issues.

League of Cities. The League of Cities is supposed to represent the interests of a diverse group—old urban areas facing stiff competition from edge cities, the growing fringe and edge communities, and small towns that may be experiencing decline or growth pressure. In this particular case, the weight of interests seemed to center on the communities that were growing aggressively and did not want any state oversight into that growth, and the League took a stance strongly opposing any legislation. As the lobbyist for the League explained:

My members are frustrated with the perception that it is cities that cause sprawl. In their view, sprawl comes from rural subdivisions that cities have no control over. . . . The state is trying to hang onto its agrarian roots at all costs, rather than sup-

porting a co-existence of urban and rural. The proof is the attempts to stop growth in urban areas.

In this case, “growth” was a code word for a city’s relatively unfettered ability to annex unincorporated (i.e., county) land.

Chambers of Commerce and Development Lobbies. The position home builders and chambers of commerce (CoCs) took was the traditional one for industry. As a legislator described the arguments made to him by lobbyists:

CoCs viewed the bill as anti-economic development. . . . The Home Builders Association—they were late to the table because they didn’t think we were actually going to do something, and when they realized we were moving ahead with the bill: “Wait a minute guys, do you understand what the implications of this bill are? We are out there building and developing and you are trying to stop us. Why?”

The road-building lobby—asphalt contractors, engineering firms, and the like, in close connection with the state Department of Transportation—did not go on the record one way or another, but respondents noted that off the record they lobbied legislators against the bills.

Groups with Varying Positions and Missing Voices

Cities. The positions taken by the cities themselves, beyond that taken by the League of Cities, varied significantly. Growing cities, often on the edge of older urban centers, opposed any sort of restrictions on their growth or annexation, and it was this contingent that was represented through the League of Cities. Des Moines, in contrast, sent representatives to meetings across the state to press for improved planning, and representatives of other old urban centers also spoke in favor of growth management legislation. At the 1998 Des Moines town meeting, Mayor Preston Daniels spoke eloquently in favor of significant state-level growth management on the model of Oregon, and tied the need to protect farmland to the need for vibrant urban areas, arguing that good growth management could achieve both those aims (P. Daniels, personal communication, August 19, 1998). The mayor of Cedar Rapids recognized the state’s growth problem as rural sprawl, stating:

Sprawl is not a city phenomenon. In Linn County, the majority of sprawl development is occurring outside of our corporate limits, in large-lot rural

subdivisions. Rural subdivisions always consume more land than urban subdivisions because of the requirements that septic fields dictate for these large lots. . . . New development must be encouraged to occur within cities to both reduce the chances of environmental damage from wells and septic systems, and to reduce the sprawl, minimizing the conversion of farmland for nonfarm uses. (L. Clancey, personal communication, September 8, 1998)

But once the details of the proposed bills, which included significant limits on the ability of cities to annex county land, became public, cities such as Des Moines withdrew support. Thus, despite general support for growth management from urban centers, the increased difficulty of annexation under the proposed legislation appeared to overcome any of its benefits for urban areas, and support from cities old or new for the proposed legislation was missing or weak.

Environmental and Farmland Protection Groups. Despite having representation as commission members, environmental and farmland protection groups were not noted by interview respondents, including legislators, as being important in the debate over the actual bills. There are two apparent explanations for this. First, environmental lobbies are not very well developed in the state, and such groups as the Iowa Public Interest Group focused on specific environmental quality issues rather than broader land use concerns.⁸ A new 1000 Friends of Iowa organization supported legislation, but their small size limited their impact. Second, the bills as written largely ignored retention of farm and natural land, thereby giving these groups little reason to expend lobbying energy on them.

APA’s National Organization and Iowa Chapter. The involvement and positions of the APA are one of the most complex parts of this story. The national organization supported growth management legislation: APA senior research fellow Stuart Meck made a presentation to the Commission on the APA’s Smart Growth initiative and also attended a meeting of the Iowa State Association of Counties to explain growth management in general. The national organization also offered to help develop the legislation, but they asked for some modest payment for their time and expenses. The lack of funds to pay them became the stated reason lawmakers chose not to pursue APA help, but evidence that the APA was willing to be flexible on fees, along with comments by interviewees, suggests that the issue may have been that legislators did not trust urban-oriented outsiders to understand the state.

At the local level, while most APA Iowa chapter members were in theory supportive of some kind of land use reform, two things happened. First, the legislation as proposed was not what many of them had hoped for and was viewed (probably appropriately) as having significant technical and policy problems. As an APA chapter officer noted:

I think cities would have been hurt with the role of annexation. It would have forced cities and counties to work together on developing plans. But I think that because it was inadequately funded, we would have seen either very poorly done plans or we would have seen a lot of noncompliance. . . . It kind of resembled a one-size-fits-all bill. It made no distinction between the metro areas and the issues they are facing and the rural areas and the issues they are facing.

Second, the positions of the chapter leadership became a problem. As the same chapter officer described it:

[The Chapter] really didn't have a consensus position that we could refer to. And our efforts were a little disjointed, because we had some of our members working with a group of mayors to draft [alternative] legislation for the cities. We had a couple of different efforts going on from our members to influence legislation as part of their role with whatever city they were with, and so it became kind of awkward and difficult for them to speak for APA if they were speaking for their employer and had a special piece of legislation that they were taking care of. It hurt us as a chapter. Because not only [did we] not have a consensus position that we could refer to, we had some of our members pursuing special interests for them[selves] and their employer.

Follow-up conversations with legislators suggested that they interpreted the lack of APA support for the bills and the activities of individual planners as efforts to derail the process. This was confusing to legislators, to say the least, and some expressed a sense of betrayal. Recently, it appears that the APA chapter has become better organized and is providing helpful advice to legislators (Lozano, 2002).

Summary and Conclusions

Part of the difficulty of growth management politics is that it splits what would seem to be cohesive interest blocks, pitting growing cities against stable or declining ones, while both are represented by the League of Cities; long-term farmers against those seeking cash for retirement, while both are represented by the Farm

Bureau; developers working in greenfield areas versus developers desiring incentives for infill development, while both are represented by the Chamber of Commerce. Table 1 compares the alignments in the Iowa case to those in successful second- and third-wave legislative efforts for growth management.

The differences between the successful, typically coastal efforts and that of Iowa are stark. Most important is the lack of clear supporters. For this legislation, people representing rural areas supported reform, while in most situations support comes from urban areas. Environmental and farmland protection voices were largely absent. Critically, the governor never expressed support, nor did House or Senate leadership, leaving the legislature without clear direction on the issue. It is no surprise that this legislation did not pass.

Policy Meanings

By listening closely to the various actors, two major narrative communities can be identified. The first is those for whom the question is a technical one—what are the best methods to improve planning across the state? Perhaps the most obvious group with this approach was the advisory committee, of which I was a member; our deliberations focused almost entirely on what the issues were and then what the best technical fixes would be. This is the way our report was written, and this is the way the initial legislation was written.

The more important community in terms of outcome (basically all the affected interest groups, including cities, counties, and most legislators) weighed land use reform not as a technical question but as a redistributive question. The institutional authority effects noted in Table 1 were preeminent. These actors understood that the legislation would change the balance of power between cities and counties; increase the power of the city board, which would rule on annexations; and increase regulatory control of development. By virtue of directing development one place and not another, the legislation would affect property values and profits through the establishment of new tax bases. Thus those opposed to the legislation spoke of cities and developers being punished for growing. The initial impetus for reform was said by several interviewees to include reigning in an uncomfortably independent Department of Transportation, and this explains the focus of the original legislation on closer control of state incentives through development of state-level strategic plans.

It would be easy to term these two narrative communities the "naïve advisory committee" and the "cynical institutional community." But speaking from a participant-observer perspective, this was the way the process was designed. The advisory committee generally

TABLE 1. The politics of state-level growth management legislation.

	Political/economic interests	Municipal geography	Party affiliation	Institutional authority
Successful legislation				
Supporting land use reform	Environmentalists, citizen activists, planners, and land use lawyers; long-term farmers; urban developers	Urban areas and inner-ring suburbs	Democrats, except those with strong ties to building trades; moderate Republican governors	Governors
Opposing land use reform	Farmers planning to subdivide; construction trades and unions; suburban developers	Rural areas (counties and small towns); growing suburbs and edge cities	Republicans, except those with older money constituency	State agencies; municipalities to the extent the legislation shifts control to the state level
Neutral/weak support	Chambers of commerce and businesses			
Iowa legislation				
Supporting land use reform	Farm bureaus; some farmers interested in staying in farming	Counties/rural areas	Republicans; some Democrats	
Opposing land use reform	Businesses/chambers of commerce/homebuilders; farmers planning to subdivide; construction trades and unions; road-building lobby	Cities, particularly growing edge cities	Many legislators who saw no reason for change or did not understand the bills	State agencies, especially the Iowa Department of Transportation
Neutral/weak support	Environmental groups	Older cities and inner suburbs		Governor

understood its role to be developing the best possible policy for Iowa at that particular time, and the elected officials had the responsibility of translating those proposals into legislation that would “sell” in the state. That translation had to include an understanding of political implications of policy proposals if legislation were to pass. There is no particular reason to say that this is an inappropriate division of responsibilities, that the development of two separate narrative communities was the problem. Instead, the issue may have been in the translation: The proposed legislation did not have sufficient technical merit to generate enough enthusiasm to overcome both inertia from those only marginally benefiting and active resistance from those who anticipated a loss of power from the reforms.

Virtually all planners are taught that at the local level it is important to ask who wins and who loses by virtue of a plan. Indeed, it has often been argued that this is a central contribution of planning as a unique field among a wide array of other advisors on urban development.⁹ Yet if we look at the main textbooks on growth management, such as Daniels (1999), Nelson and Duncan (1995), or Porter (1997), while the need for coalition building is described, analysis of the effects of policy on the redistribution of power are largely absent.¹⁰

In the Iowa case, distribution of power and potential was the question that mattered. Those who felt they would gain power—counties—did not see the shift as significant enough to fight for, while those with an expectation of losing fought hard. This also helps make sense

of the conflicted role of the planners who were involved. As professionals, they supported technical approaches to correcting and improving planning processes. But as employees of various organizations (including county and suburban planning departments and infrastructure authorities), they could not help but be cognizant of their employers' interests, particularly as their individual professional status is in part tied to the level of power and tax base of their employing organization. Suburban planners did not want to negotiate with their county counterparts over planning or annexation, regardless of the technical appropriateness of such a step.

The debate also engaged questions of the state's identity. Was it to be a modern, perhaps even liberal, state with urban values and policies, as exemplified by more rigorous planning? Or is the state at heart still agrarian, with the high esteem for individual freedoms and property rights that value set usually entails?¹¹ One of the key tools included in the Commission report—urban growth boundaries—was dropped completely from any legislative efforts. The problem may have begun with the very term *urban* in a state where few identify themselves that way. Indeed, talk of reigning in *growth* in a state with a strong farming culture may create significant dissonance in values at the outset.

Given the slow growth of its population and economy, there was a sense that Iowa should be happy for any investment by developers and not question or attempt to direct their decisions; there was a fear of appearing ungrateful. The passion suggested by opponents' casting of the policy as punishment for cities and developers gains particular freight within a culture in which civility is prized and conflict avoided, and where the phrase *Iowa nice*, for better and for worse, still applies. Additionally, for part-time legislators with little knowledge of the intricacies of land use, the length of the bills was intimidating and the need for reform unclear. Ultimately, the appeal of change was not enough to overcome the challenges and risks of redistributing power and running afoul of the traditional values of the state.

Lessons for Future Efforts

Perhaps the primary difference between slow-growth states in the Midwest and the mostly coastal states that have enacted significant state-level growth management lies in the balance of urban and rural power. Perhaps in Oregon, Willamette Valley residents can tell the rest of the state what to do, but in many states, much of the legislative power remains vested in rural representatives, particularly in the state senates. Successful legislation will need to address rural needs in ways that are much more substantive than has been the norm in more urban

states, and it will have to fit more closely to a rural cultural affinity.¹² This may be particularly challenging, as much of the growth that occurs is in the rural countryside—rural sprawl. Annexation issues in states with unincorporated land must be carefully addressed, as this is the proving ground for the balance of power between urban and rural, city and county. Coalition building needs to reflect these power issues. Farm bureaus need to be recruited as key supporters, because legislators tend to understand the farm bureau as the arbiter of rural interests. Courting counties is similarly important.

However, it will be difficult to pass growth management legislation with no urban support, as metropolitan areas retain the majority of the population and thus the weight of representation in the state legislatures. Creating clear links between the interests of rural areas and the center cities and inner-ring suburbs can create powerful coalitions, as can the linking of farming, recreation, and urban quality-of-life considerations. Providing incentives for business and home building, such as speedier permitting or otherwise increasing the certainty of the development process, will be important. These coalitions are crucial, because heartland states may not be able to count on getting significant political push from the key initiator behind many growth management efforts—the environmental lobby. While environmentalists certainly exist in these states, their organizations are less well developed than those in coastal and more urban states and thus less influential with legislators, leaving a vacuum of power.

Local APA chapter leaders could possibly step in to fill that role, but to do so, they will need to have more separation from the interests of their employers as well as more confidence (perhaps more say) in the contents of particular bills than was the case in Iowa. Easy solutions for balancing the public interest with employers' interests among chapter leadership are not apparent, but the issue needs to be clearly addressed by the national organization. Chapter activities may require more oversight by, or at least more advice from, the national organization when states are considering land use reform.

In calling for and designing state-level growth management programs, planners and policymakers need to be more explicitly cognizant of the redistribution of power inherent in such policy. To do so effectively, we need to analyze the likely redistributive outcomes of specific legislation, allowing us to weigh both the appropriateness and political consequences of particular policy proposals. It is tempting to pretend that if we do not openly discuss the redistributive function of growth management policies, others will not comprehend those consequences either. But as this case shows, that is a vain hope. By supporting growth management legislation,

planners are not just providing technical corrections. Instead, we are shifting the balances of power between city and county, city and suburb, long-term farmer and land-speculative farmer, legislature and state agencies, and municipal bodies and state bodies. The dynamics are complex. The good news is that the consideration of who wins and who loses is one with which planning has a long history. Attention to the power repercussions of growth management policy will improve chances for success in other legislative efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article would not have been possible without the generosity of my interviewees in sharing their time and the collegiality of my fellow commissioners. Drafts of the article were sent to four key respondents for comment, and I thank them for their responses. Kiran Darapureddy provided able research assistance. The article benefited from comments from Frank Popper, Ann Strong, Dan Marcucci, Carl Abbott, anonymous referees, and the *JAPA* copy editors. My thanks to Riad Mahayni and Linda Dalton for encouraging me to reflect on the Commission's process. I presented a very early version of this article, focusing on the content of the legislative bills, at the 14th Annual Conference on the Small City and Regional Community in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2000.

NOTES

1. The state with the most comprehensive evaluation of politics, as well as outcomes is, no doubt, Oregon, which is usually considered a first-wave state; but by virtue of having support from the business community, it has strong similarities to the politics of second-wave states. Regarding the politics of Oregon's efforts, see Abbott (1994), DeGrove (1991), Hibbard (1994), Howe (1993), Knaap (1994), and Leo et al. (1998).
2. Beyond the reasons noted above, Meeks (1990) explains that in the 1980s, reductions in federal funding for local land use and environmental programs led to increased local reliance on impact fees and exactions to fund infrastructure needs. To the extent that new legislation promised to rationalize and limit the fiscal demands of local government, some business interests supported state growth management and planning requirements.
3. My involvement occurred while I was on faculty at Iowa State University (ISU). The chair of the ISU Department of Community and Regional Planning was the official designee in the legislation, and he appointed me to serve for him.
4. After the Commission's work ended, I undertook interviews with seven individuals who were either elected officials working on the growth management bills resulting from this process or representatives of interest groups most active in the debate. These individuals were selected initially from my knowledge of which groups were active in the process, and then during each interview I asked the respondent what other individuals and groups were important in the debate. In this particular case, the universe of key actors was reported to be small, and I was able to interview representatives of all groups that received multiple mentions. The eight core questions in these semistructured interviews focused on the respondent's background and role in the process and the politics and process of the Commission and the legislation, as well as its future prospects. I asked respondents for their interpretations of why events happened. I and a research assistant, Kiran Darapureddy, also reviewed the testimonies given at the 10 public hearings held across the state. Kiran summarized the comments of each speaker into three categories: the speaker's affiliation, the key topic, and the story line. For this research, we reviewed the testimonies of those representing particular interest groups, as the focus here is on the stakeholder politics rather than a full narrative account of public views. Both interview transcripts and public testimonies were coded into categories of events, political support, and narratives for and against; these address the "Why?" question, usually framed with past, present, and future consequences. Except where noted as "personal communication," the quotes in this article came from these interviews. Quotes cited as personal communication are from transcripts of the public hearings.
5. An example of rural sprawl in Iowa is the experience of Mill County, on the western border of the state. Despite appearing very rural, 23% of its current homes were built in the last 5 years, usually on quite large lots (Hamin & Benson, 2001).
6. Fallon was reelected in 2000, receiving about 92% of the votes in his district.
7. The Commission was established under House Concurrent Resolution No. 17, dated March 12, 1997 and sponsored by Representative Edward Fallon. It was chaired by two Republican representatives, one from each House, because Republicans were the majority power, while two minority representatives (Democrats), also one from each House, were members, including Representative Fallon. The 21 commissioners included representatives of many of the interest groups affected by such legislation—builders, city and county governments, farmers, environmental groups, public transit officials, architects and planners—and myself as the representative of Iowa State University's Community and Regional Planning Department. Notably absent was the State's powerful Department of Transportation. It is unclear how much effect leaving this key player out of the process had, but as has been documented by Innes (1992), in other successful states, all relevant key players were brought to the table.
8. This assessment is based on conversations I had with PIRG officials and information on their Web site (<http://www.iowapirg.org/>).
9. Examples of those claiming the centrality of this question for the planning profession are almost too numerous to include, but two representatives are Klosterman (1996) and Mazza (2002). Generally speaking, much of the body

of work of such planning theorists as Forester (e.g., 1989, 1999), Mandelbaum (e.g., 2000), Sandercock (1998), and Flyvbjerg (1998), as well as others, are devoted to the distribution of power and public goods.

10. The APA has been notably sensitive to the importance of seeking local press coverage and getting wide dissemination of materials on smart growth. However, their research and recommendations do not specifically address power issues. In their case, however, this may be a strategic decision to minimize conflict from explicit public discussion of the effects of growth management on the redistribution of power.
11. Pendall (2001), for instance, found that perspectives on local planning vary with general perspectives on property rights, and sentiment favoring property rights was stronger in rural areas.
12. The focus of this article has not been the contents of such bills, but some possibilities that come to mind include encouraging targeted growth areas in unincorporated land; addressing rural sprawl not by halting rural development but improving it through design solutions; and providing economic development incentives linked to rural growth management. Regarding rural land use design, see the work of Arendt (1999), Campoli et al. (2001), or Sargent et al. (1991).

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