

Free-marketers on the way up but planning interventionists on the way down? Economic crisis and planning's rescue narrative from the Great Depression to the Crash of 2008-9

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“The political environment in Washington may be the most favorable for planners since the Great Society era of the 1960s. It is timely that we recognize the 50th anniversary of ACSP at a moment when planning is once again on the rise and that we meet in the nation's capital at a moment of expanding federal support.” (ACSP 2009 Call for Papers)

Introduction

In this current crisis in labor, finance and housing markets, will support for strong, interventionist planning intensify? Recent writings and statements from planners (including the ACSP 2009 statement above) do make this claim. Linking public planning support to private sector woes is not new. From early planning advocates during the Progressive Era, to the Great Depression, the “urban crisis” of the 1960s, the deindustrialization of the 1970s to today's economic “Great Recession,” defenders of planning frequently invoke the image of planning as an antidote to the chaos and uncertainties of the market – i.e., a “rescue narrative.”¹ The language is often a mix of *predictive* (tough times will lead to greater planning support) and *prescriptive* (tough times should lead to more planning).²

Today's belief in the resurgence of planning may rest in part on one planning mythology: American planning's finest hour occurred during crisis (specifically the Great Depression and World War II). In American planning histories, in the 1930s the federal government finally discovered urban American as a policy concern (and American cities discovered the federal government as a source of both funding and legitimacy)³; collective community interests gained sway over American “rugged individualism;” and the rational, tidy voice of city planning and

¹ One might identify a second kind of “rescue narrative” in planning: responsible, efficient “good government” planning to replace the corrupt, graft-ridden patronage of big city machine politics.

² I began this research in March 2009 when the economic outlook was still dire and precarious, and the Dow was below 6,000 and shaky. The global economic outlook has improved, or at least stabilized, though the unemployment levels have not gone down. That said, the talk of a second Depression has abated somewhat, though some pessimists still predict that the worst is yet to come, with a second wave of foreclosures (due to adjustable rate mortgages, etc.) on its way.

³ An early step in this new local-federal relationship already came in the last year of the Hoover Administration: “The Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 did one notable thing. It placed municipalities in direct contact with the federal government in no uncertain way first on relief and second on loans for “self-liquidating” projects. Just as the unemployment relief situation resulted in federal legislation affecting every urban government in the United States, it now appears that the crisis in municipal finance will lead to some additional action by the federal government” (Betters 1933).

regulation was a welcome counterpoint to the giddy, chaotic and reckless 1920s financial and land speculation.

Does the nation therefore turn to planning and government intervention in times of crisis, only to jettison planning for free market ideology during civilian boom times? In its most mechanistic form, this pattern imagines a direct, inverse relationship between economic cycles and support for planning. Deep down lie the tensions between the market and public planning, alternating between collaboration, symbiosis, conflict and collusion. Disparate interpretations of this public-private tension lead to divergent arguments for (and against) planning, from the market failure model, the property contradiction model (Foglesong 1986), David Harvey's view of planning (Harvey 1985), Hayek's critique of centralized planning (Hayek 1944) and its contemporary variants (Gordon, Richardson, and PUBLIUS) 2001; Pennington 2002), the enduring role of the public interest as distinct from the private (Campbell and Marshall 2002), etc.

The underlying logic of this model is straightforward: the free-market and public planning are counter-cyclical, periodically exchanging roles as the dominant or recessive forces in society. The model has a simple appeal and a certain (if imperfect) empirical reality. Its overly mechanistic relationship between crisis and planning in our profession's past also requires adding complications and an institutional-historical backdrop, hopefully without completely muddling what remains a salient model of planning's relationship to private enterprise.

Complicating the Model (Free Market's Crisis → Planning's Rise)

This abstract model is complicated in several ways. First, this view presumes a unitary sense of planning, obscuring the widely uneven support of various "planning" activities (e.g., significant efforts in public housing, urban renewal and infrastructure during the ostensibly "weak planning" decade of the 1950s).⁴ A broad view of planning would include a set of interventions with divergent levels of public support (e.g., planning as financial market regulation, land use regulation, tax policy, government subsidies of industries, bank bail-outs, environmental regulation). During the New Deal, the most assertive advocates of planning put forth a rather extensive definition of planning, seeing the opportunity to integrate local land use planning with state and federal economic planning. (Conversely, the challenge for urban planners during the cold war era was to maintain support for local, physical planning in the face of fervent opposition to top-down national planning – i.e., to differentiate between small-scale planning and large-scale Planning (for a discussion of the unfortunate red-baiting of the idea of planning, see Galbraith 1971).)

Second, there are competing variants of the model: (a) planning as understudy: Planning serves as the understudy to capitalism, waiting patiently in the wings as the free market performs nightly on stage, with planning ready to step in when the market periodically falls ill (e.g., crises of accumulation); (b) planning as preventative medicine: The lack of planning regulation helped trigger the crisis, and early, proactive planning would have prevented the crisis. Add to these a third, hybrid variant: (c) planning as counterbalance: the cycles of planning support and rejection do not mirror the cycles of economic crisis and growth; instead, planning arises to

⁴One also needs to differentiate between rhetoric and use: i.e., public perceptions about planning vs. the actual use of planning (e.g., the stated opposition to centralized regional planning and yet its tacit support by other names)

address the crisis of rapid growth itself (urban overcrowding, housing shortages, environmental and social ills). If the first variant represents the simplest model of planning and market growth as countercyclical, both the second and especially the third (hybrid) models arguably better fit much of planning history, including the birth of modern planning itself during the Progressive Era.

Third, the belief in “crisis as planning’s finest hour” arises largely from the specific experience of the New Deal and wartime planning – and the ricochet effect of the depression-war sequencing. (Similarly, the anti-planning ideology after 1945 was not simply a generalized response to renewed economic vitality, but also a specific outcome of cold war rhetoric against communist central planning). These are historically unique, contingent moments, rather than universal models of crisis/planning response. Eighty years later, we are experiencing a considerably different crisis, in an era of remarkably different cities, economic and government institutions. The public’s response to – and support of – planning will correspondingly be quite different. One example: massive public works (e.g., TVA, WPA, Robert Moses’ swimming pools) (Ballon and Jackson 2007) shaped the New Deal link between Keynesianism and urban/regional planning – and catalyzed national interest in local planning efforts. Despite the renewed call for “shovel-ready” projects to create jobs today, planning projects will not automatically be at the forefront of contemporary national economic revitalization.

Finally, planning is not a static entity with eternal, unwavering values and ideology, ready to respond to social emergencies. Crises are transformative, not only for cities and industries, but for the nature and purpose of planning itself. Crises trigger not just increased demand for planning, but also planning’s adaptation, innovation and redefinition in both positive and troubling ways, with progressive or regressive trajectories. Planning both discovered new progressive agendas during the New Deal and abandoned some cherished values that didn’t fit into the exigencies of the FDR era. Planning emerged as a different field in 1945 than it was in 1933 – and took the field into domains that could not have been foreseen by most planners in the 1920s. The same will arguably apply to planning’s predicted resurgence today: the field will likely re-emerge, not just as a hopefully a more powerful field, but also as a different institution with altered values and priorities. The extent of planning’s transformation will depend not only on the depth and length of the current crisis, but also on how planning responds to the situation and how both the public and federal policy reposition the role of local and regional planning in the larger national response to the crisis.

In the rest of this exploratory paper I focus on the last two points from above: comparing the narratives (of rescue and otherwise)⁵ between the 1930s and today, and how economic crisis not only increases the level of planning, but also redirects the profession.

The Rescue Narrative: then and now

Despite the initial title of the paper, the language advocating an increased role for planning (and planners) is not always a “rescue narrative”; instead, planners proven right (about the

⁵ Whether the notion of planner as “rescuer” is appropriate or not often depends on the conception of the planner: as visionary, as the maintainer/keeper of the city, as reformer, as the referee, as documentarian, etc. At the extreme one might envision the role of planner as superhero – but planners’ typical modesty would generally preclude that role.

dangers of speculative growth, of sprawl, etc.), a time for planners to seize the moment, a time that best matches the long-standing values and priorities of planning; or even a time for planning to gain more respect (though I somewhat surprisingly haven't heard the latter as much as expected).

Rescue Narrative during the Great Depression

Curious to find parallels between contemporary advocates of planning and earlier voices, I examined a selection of planning literature from the early days of the Great Depression (ca. 1930 – 1935), in particular the journal *City Planning* (from the American City Planning Institute and National Conference on City Planning) and also the municipal public works-oriented *The American City* and the *National Municipal Review*. I was especially interested in two questions. First, were the writers conscious at the time that they were making an argument for a new and expanded role for planning, or did this historic transformation of planning during the New Deal only become apparent years later in hindsight? Second, how did the planner's view of their profession's role, opportunities and obstacles change from in the early 1930s from the Hoover Administration into the first years of Roosevelt's New Deal?

The tone of writing about planning and the Depression during the early 1930s was a mix of both hope and caution, arguing for the power of planning and also the need to persevere during times when planning may not always get the funds or support it needs. As in 2009, planners and other local government officials in the early 1930s were constantly engaged in a battle to combat the efforts by some to address the economic crisis simply through budget cuts (and cuts in local services). "We are beaten almost into insensibility ... by a constant bombardment of anti-government propaganda" laments an article in the *National Municipal Review* (Buttenheim 1933, 118) There was also a frequent emphasis on the need to defend the relatively recent tool of zoning.

Harold Buttenheim⁶, the longtime editor of the journal *City Planning*, emphasized the progressive power "to learn lessons from adversity" and that the timing was right to expand the role of planning as an investment in the future:

"We in the United States, in common with many other countries, have been passing through a distressing period of unemployment. Recent months have witnessed a growing belief that the severity of the depression would have been much less if our national, state, and local governments had made the physical and financial plans during good times for needed public works to be started when unemployment began to threaten. Here is a great opportunity for public service by the city planning profession. While continuing to urge, as they should, the carrying-out of city and regional plans during good times, let them urge also that there be spread over the cycle of prosperous years before our next depression, the preparation of additional plans which can be carried out during the depression, and much of the payment for which may be spread by the bond issue method over the prosperous years which follow the depression (Buttenheim 1931, 115).

⁶ For more information on Buttenheim, editor at *City Planning* from 1911 – 1955, see a special issue of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 3.

A 1930 National Bureau of Economic Research report on “Planning and control of public works” did cautiously note that public works alone can’t fully address the unemployment problem, yet can provide an important stabilizing and growth function:

"Long-range planning and budgeting are necessary if the full value of public works as a stabilizing influence is to be developed. ... Fortunately, the recent trend toward city and regional planning makes the task an easier one than it would have been even a few years ago.. . Comprehensive physical planning of public works within each city and region is a clear and evident need. This enables sites to be acquired in advance and plans to be made well ahead of the actual start of the work, so that when an emergency comes discretionary projects can go ahead with assurance that they are properly located and well adapted for the purpose for which they are intended, and without the delays that might ensue if the relative merits of different locations and alternative plans for structures had to be debated, or else decided arbitrarily on the basis of hasty consideration” (Wolman and National Bureau of Economic Research. 1930).

Planners did make the connection between the benefits of planning and the way out of the financial crisis. Under the banner: “Editorial: value of city plans in expediting public improvements during a period of depression,” the July 1931 issue of *City Planning* asserted the value of planning during the ongoing economic crisis, including the “relation between the city plan and unemployment relief”: “Discussions of the value of city plans in expediting public improvements during a period of depression have ceased to be academic, for we now have not only a first-class depression but also many cities and regions with plans and active planning commissions. It has therefore seemed to us worth while to set down for future guidance any conclusions on this subject which have grown out of the experiences of the last year” (Menhinick 1931). Their survey of 33 city engineers in various US cities showed that the vast majority of public works projects were items proposed in the city plan. The survey showed that the existence of city plans both improved the likelihood of public support for bonds (“the undertaking of additional construction work as a means of relieving unemployment has proved an important argument in successful campaigns for bond issues”) and speeded the project completion (“existing city plans have expedited public improvements during this period of depression”). Overall, both the substance and the tone of this and other period writings emphasized planning’s benefit for making economic recovery faster, more efficient, and more likely to receive federal funding support. Planning represented the rational, competent, methodical antidote to economic inertia and chaos. It provided the hope of a restoration of normalcy after the economic and psychological shock of the Depression.

Nevertheless, planning was not initially and whole-heartedly welcomed in the early days of the Depression (pre FDR). Buttenheim lamented the initial lack of local support for planning, but saw some signs of hope:

A crisis does not create city plans; it reveals plans, or the lack of them and the need for them. When happier days return, let us devise such plans as will not only stand the strain of good times but will come to the aid of our cities in future times of crisis. ... It is unfortunate, both for our cities and our city planners, that the last two years of crisis have shown little tendency toward increased activity in city planning in the United States. But these two years have at least brought some demonstrations of the fact that plans "in hours of gladness willed may be in hours of gloom fulfilled." They have brought also increased

recognition of the wastefulness of unplanned or hastily planned spending and of the economic as well as civic importance of future long-range planning of public works, national, state, and local. (Buttenheim 1932, 99).

That said, Buttenheim still had confidence that good planning could make a difference in an economic crisis, providing both work and market stability (including the economic depression-fighting power of zoning!):

A profound influence on future planning will unquestionably result from the tragic experience of most of the world during the last two years with uncontrolled economic forces. That these forces are actually uncontrollable by far-sighted planning and intelligent organization we cannot believe. Indeed, we have the experience in such cities as Cincinnati, St. Paul, and Springfield (Mass.), to show the great benefits resulting in these recent months of business depression from the existence of previously prepared city plans and of a courageous determination to carry them out. Not only have these cities maintained local employment at a remarkably high level; they are building permanent assets of great future value, instead of leaning on the frail and dubious support of hastily planned "made work." Other lessons, also, learned from the bitter experience of 1930 and 1931, will serve as a spur to rational planning in the years ahead. The widespread deflation of real estate values; the financial failure of some of the greatest skyscraper office buildings, hotels, and apartment houses in important cities; the near or actual bankruptcy of many municipalities, which might have been avoided by previous long-range planning and budgeting of public works, these and other forces cannot fail to stimulate increased public interest in the future control of community destinies. The Federal Government stepped forward in the right direction when early in 1931 there was established by Act of Congress the Federal Employment Stabilization Board, for the future advance planning and regulated construction of Federal public works. One important detail of the relationship of zoning to economic welfare to which the present plight of many retail merchants gives emphasis, is the question, "How much to zone for business?" ... (Buttenheim 1932, 105-6).

Another author in the same issue made a similar argument, emphasizing planning's benefits of providing stability, efficiency and honesty. If the writing is a rescue narrative, it is not the high-profile dramatics of a superhero, but instead a modest but confident voice that rational, public-minded institutions, applied with sustained effort, can right the listing ship:

The world-wide economic depression has revealed more clearly than ever before the advantages of carefully prepared comprehensive plans, in charge of honest public authorities, which have in some instances actually guided construction of public works so effectively that unemployment has been reduced and needed improvements secured without loss or waste (Hubbard 1932).

In the early 1930s, zoning was still a relatively young tool for planning (the landmark Euclid vs. Amber zoning case was only 6 years old). Planners encountered particular resistance to zoning during the economic crisis, since many landowners viewed restrictive zoning as a barrier for them to find a more economically viable use for their land (e.g., allowing small businesses in residential neighborhoods). Planners were quick to point out that the social interests of rational planning and zoning outweighed a short-term, individual gain from deviating from zoning (through either upzoning or allowing business uses in residences). The "father of American

zoning,” Edward M. Bassett (who wrote the first comprehensive zoning act for New York City in 1916), actively defended zoning during this economic crisis:

The period of the depression has brought many difficulties to public officials charged with maintaining zoning plans. Many home owners have suffered losses, and in thinking over their assets they wonder whether their home sites might not sell for higher prices before long if they were placed in a multiple- family district or a business district. They talk with their neighbors, and after a while a petition to change the zoning district reaches the council. In the public hearings the applicants rightly say that they cannot sell their home sites for residence purposes and they think their land should be placed in a different district so that when building begins again they can sell at a better price. ... In the course of nearly every argument on such an application a statement is made that the land cannot be sold or used at the present time for any other purpose, and that the owner must earn something in order to pay his taxes. In other cases homeowners try to obtain variances to start a small business in their homes in residence districts. Sometimes it is a tailor shop, a plumbing shop, or a stationery store” (Bassett 1932).

Bassett went on to praise the wise reasoning of the Cleveland Board of Zoning Appeals, made in their annual report of the for the year 1931:

The depression is a temporary incident that will eventually pass as an excuse for a zoning violation. The damage to a neighborhood or to the city as a whole resulting from a let-down in the enforcement of the zoning ordinance under the guise of charity would be irreparable and would far out-weigh any temporary benefit that might accrue to a comparatively small percentage of the citizens. With the Board it was a case of the greatest good and protection to the greatest number.’ (quoted in Bassett 1932).

Bassett’s reasoning reflected a leitmotif of planning advocates during the Depression: that planning could not only aid in the nation’s economic recovery, but that planning created long-term benefits for communities, and that cities and states should avoid the temptation for short-term “fixes” gained by either loosening zoning regulations, laying off municipal planning staff, or cutting budgets to reduce deficits. (It’s hard to decipher to what extent this advocacy was rooted in idealistic altruism or professional self-preservation.)

Henry Vincent Hubbard, landscape architect at Harvard and founder and early editor of *City Planning* magazine, also stressed the importance of planning during the Depression. He also viewed the era as potentially redemptive, getting rid of old wasteful ways and now more in line with planning’s spirit of efficiency, rationality, and long-term benefits:

Out of the depression may come a new order in municipal government, an order characterized by efficiency and economy. If this result is achieved it will be due partially at least to the fact that city planning has played its part both through depression and in the ensuing period of returning prosperity. Curtailment of planning activities at this time is shortsighted finance. Municipal construction cannot be stopped in hard times, for roads wear out and sewers become obsolete. The only choice a city has is a choice between planned growth and unplanned growth. The latter is wasteful; the former, economical.

City planning consultants, planning engineers and secretaries, and members of city planning commissions have an obligation to convey this fact to their communities. Necessary appropriations for city planning should not be allowed to dry up because of a mistaken belief on the part of city officials that city planning is something the community can get along without, when, as a matter of fact, it is infinitely more economical in dollars and cents to have city planning than to be without it. (Hubbard 1932)

A related narrative during this period focused on the undervaluation of planning – and the corresponding need for planners to be less modest about their contributions and to better market themselves to the public, especially in the face of pressures to reduce municipal budgets by laying-off planners. The landscape architect and planner J. Haslett Bell argued:

In the fall of 1929, when disaster came to Wall Street, not much concern was felt by city planning commissions nor by city planners as to the progress of their efforts and their work; but in 1930 drastic action was being taken by city governments to cut down municipal expenses, and by 1932 well-trained city planning technicians were looking in vain for work in their calling. One could, at that time, count on his fingers the number of resident city planners still holding full-time jobs.

Should such a young and vigorous national movement as city planning have received such a devastating blow at a time when the need of planning was most urgent? Was there not some weakness in the foundation of this new profession that caused it to be so susceptible to the shock? ...

Why was this cessation of city planning endeavor so universal? Study of city planning practice shows clearly that it was because this work was not recognized as an important municipal function. ... It appears that those who have given their time to city planning have been so involved in the technical planning that they have not considered whether the people knew that planning is essential. (Bell 1934)

So the spirit for planning in the early Depression years before FDR was bleak but also one where planning will emerge as a source of redemption. Planners were already anticipating the growth of their profession. They also advocated for a shift in their field from aesthetic to more economic concerns as a way to gain more professional support – a shift which presages the postwar shift in planning away from architecture into economic policy as well:

Before undertaking to discuss the trends of a year which for many city planners was the most discouraging they have known, your historian ventures boldly into the realm of prophecy. Here is his prediction: The era of reckless expansion of competitive facilities for manufacture and trade, which was a major cause of the present depression, will be succeeded by an era of rational expansion of public works and of city rebuilding, which will be major factors in future prosperity. This will mean for architects, engineers, and planning consultants opportunities for greater public service and greater private rewards than they have ever enjoyed.

Those idealists who embrace city planning primarily as an esthetic force may deplore this emphasis on city planning as an economic force. But if the present unhappy state of our nation and world can teach us anything, one outstanding lesson will be the present-day dependence of esthetics on economics. Mere wealth, of course, will not bring planned cities and a planned society; but our leaders in government and business are gradually learning the wholesome lesson that without planned cities and a planned society mere wealth can scarcely even exist in this modern world (Buttenheim 1933, 73).

This divided sense of planning's hardships and prospects in 1932 (a "best of times, worst of times" scenario) was also voiced by Flavel Shurtleff, Secretary, National Conference on City Planning, who also saw planning shifting more into economic policy:

If I were overwhelmed with honesty, I would say that the only indisputable trend in planning in 1932 had been its putting up a fight for its life. From all I have heard, planning

has been on the defensive, where it has had any support at all during the last year, in all but a very few cities in the country, and even in those there has been no very definite trend. If we follow the talk and study the papers of the planners themselves, there is some evidence of a trend toward linking planning more closely with public administration as a vital measure of economy (Flavel Shurtleff, quoted in Buttenheim 1933, 73-4).

The Tone Shifts with FDR in 1933

“The need for this planning is greater to-day than ever before. ...Here, in the field of city planning, are tasks for giants at a time when there are all too few giants in the land!” -- Howard K. Menhinick, Executive Secretary of American City Planning Institute (1935-35), and later professor of planning at Georgia Tech (Menhinick 1934).

As expected, the narrative changes after the inauguration of President Roosevelt in March, 1933. The change is not immediate: looking backwards, President Hoover had already implemented a few government spending stimulus programs late in his administration, and looking forwards, the New Deal would take a while to get underway, including the so-called “Second New Deal” in 1935. That said, the tone of planners in 1933 began to dramatically shift. For Harold Buttenheim, the editor of *City Planning*, his earlier optimistic wishes seemed to be coming true: “The stimulation of public works and of planning and housing are outstanding characteristics of the New Deal” (Buttenheim 1934, 62).

Most striking is the spotlight on planning from above: the rapid emergence of “national planning” as a standard phrase and as a source of newfound optimism, legitimacy and – in particular -- resources. Of particular impact was the creation of the National Planning Board with funds from the CWA and the PWA – and the use of funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to support slum clearance, plus the use of CWA funds were available to fund planning, mapping, data collection, etc. (Buttenheim 1934, 72). Linked to the rise of national planning was the greater “correlation of physical and economic planning” (Buttenheim 1934, 65) – and the corresponding shift from aesthetic to economic concerns. Planners cited as examples, not only the National Planning Board, but also new efforts by the National Conference on City Planning and the rise of new government agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Subsistence Homesteads Division of the Department of the Interior. Now that the federal government was directly involved, there was more weighty sense of authority for planning; it was now directly linked to the legitimate functions of the US government (Hall 1934, 173-4).

This rapid expansion of planning in both scale and scope also led to controversy that invariably came with the higher profile, ambitions, funding levels and power of planning. There was a sense that this was planning’s moment: that planning was getting swept up and allied into the larger political and economic forces – and ideological debates – of the era. One sees in the early days of the New Deal a tension that would continue to be a leitmotif of planning debates in decades to come: the choice between expanding planning into the bright national spotlight of politics and social policy and retaining planning’s more modest technical agenda within local land use and design administration. (One certainly doesn’t see this same level of upswing in the coupling of local and national policies happening today.)

Central to the idea of planning was the long-term management of resources, whose complexity and interconnectedness made planning an appealing alternative to ad hoc, uncoordinated efforts:

So much converged in the resources problem -- land, water, forests; erosion control, flood control, navigation, irrigation, reclamation; dams, power, poverty, politics. Here, if anywhere, central coordination seemed necessary. The indiscriminate pressure for flood control appropriations in the winter of 1933-34 helped force the issue. 'We have been going ahead year after year,' Roosevelt remarked, 'with rivers and harbors bills and various other pieces of legislation which were more or less dependent, as we all know, on who could talk the loudest. There has never been any definite planning. 'What was necessary now, he believed, was to 'put the physical development of the country on a planned basis.' To this end, he was thinking in terms of a 'permanent long-range planning commission' which could lay out a twenty-five- or fifty-year program for national development (Schlesinger 1957, 350).

Charles W. Eliot 2nd, who had worked at the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and would later direct the National Resources Planning Board, noted the ambivalent public response to planning's sudden rise in stature – though he optimistically reasoned that public support for planning would naturally increase with increased public knowledge of planning's good works:

The repeated emphasis put on national planning in almost every speech by President Roosevelt has made the American public conscious of "planning" as an active force and process. Naturally, this new awareness of planning has produced a variety of reactions in the public mind, depending on the interpretations and meanings which are given to the word. Those of us who have watched the progress of city and regional planning see in national planning a natural extension of familiar principles and policies which have proved their value to the "average citizen" in numerous communities. Others, without that association or previous contact with the term, see in it dangers of "regimentation," "interference with natural liberties," or some dreaded influence of an imagined "brain trust." (Eliot 1934).

And then Eliot, after quoting FDR on the merits of planning, assuages the concerns about the dangers of rigid planning. Significantly, he rejects the argument that New Deal planning would mimic Soviet-style planning. He instead uses a common line of argumentation in American politics: to demonstrate that an ostensibly exotic or foreign program has in fact a long American tradition (a strategy the current President Obama has employed as well):

It seems to me that those who are worried or profess to be worried over the possible imposition of some kind of Russian Five Year Plan upon the American people are somewhat inconsistent. With one breath they denounce what they call "planning" and in the next, demand that the Administration in Washington put forward a "program" or a statement of the controlling inner purposes behind all the varied activities of the Federal Government, in brief, they demand what others of us might call a "plan." Perhaps all that they really mean is that a Russian bugaboo has become a standard trick in playing politics.

Americans should realize that Soviet Russia did not invent national planning. Neither did President Roosevelt. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the Constitution of the United States was the first national plan, a program, with carefully defined limits, for the accomplishment of six specified purposes. National planning is distinctly an American idea. American history is a continuous record of partial plans for one or another phase of our national development, as witness Hamilton's Plan for Manufactures, Gallatin's and John Quincy Adams' Public Works Plans, Clay's American System, the land policy for the

settlement of the West with its unique provision for setting aside regular sections for endowment of future schools, the budget system set up in 1921, and, even as late as the Hoover Administration, the establishment of the Federal Employment Stabilization Board. Now the time has come to go on in the same spirit” (Eliot 1934, 104).

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, in a speech to the National Conference on City Planning in Baltimore, October 1933, stated the support from the federal government for planning. He combined the vision of this American efficiency with an appeal to serving the collective good. Following the pattern of other writers, Ickes evoked a historical narrative that the past was one of frontier individualism but the future was one of (presumably urban and collective) social interests:

“Intelligent and comprehensive planning on a national scale fits into the social vision of the future. If, as I believe, we are now definitely committed to the testing of new social values; if we have turned our backs for all time on the dreadful implications in the expression "rugged individualism"; if we have firmly set our feet to tread a new and more desirable social path ; if we have given over the feeding not only ourselves but our women and our children to the gluttony of ruthless industrialism; if it is our purpose to make industrialism serve humanity, then national planning will become a major governmental activity” (Harold Ickes, quoted in Buttenheim 1934, 65).

Overall, there was an optimistic confidence about the future of planning – somewhat inspiring and somewhat naïve. The rhetoric implied that planning was coming of age at the right historical moment -- a sense that the field has progressed with history. Rather than a view that planning has been sitting quietly on the sidelines waiting for its time, instead a confidence that planning’s moment had come from the simultaneous confluence of two developments: the economic crisis of the Great Depression and the 30+ year emergence of planning as a new field (and particularly with the institutionalization and professionalization of planning in the previous decade of the 1920s):

I think there is no question but that we are entering definitely into an era that will be characterized by planning. The world of to-morrow will be a planned world. Within recent years the movement that originated in the "garden city" and "city beautiful" aspects has expanded in every direction. We have learned or are learning that physical planning as such, while important and central, cannot by any means be the whole story. A city is often not so much a geographical or political entity as it is a state of mind. From the city concept we have passed to the regional concept, but even here we have found that regions must in some way be coordinated, and thus, limited by historical, geographical, and political barriers, we have progressed to county and inter-county plans. (Newcomb 1934)

For some writers, it was important to emphasize that planning was not just a creation of the New Deal. Instead, many planning efforts predated 1933 – with the implication that the planning profession, if not anticipating the New Deal, at least had added legitimacy of a field that has long worked towards goals that only recently received federal attention and support. At the 1935 conference on “Planning For The Future of American Cities” meetings held by the American Society of Planning Officials, a conference chair Jacob Crane observed (in an introduction tellingly titled “The Planning Process as a Remedy”): “In looking over this program it occurred to me that much of what is going on much of what has received such great stimulus these days

got its first impetus before the New Deal. I am thinking particularly of the National Land Use Planning Committee which was organized under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture about five years ago and which, in its discussions and publications, laid the groundwork for a great amount of what is now going on with increased acceleration” (Crane 1935). This is not quite a “I told you so; we were way ahead of the country,” but rather a diplomatic way of emphasizing that planning’s increased role in the New Deal is a logical and reasonable outcome of the profession’s prior work.

The tone of planners’ writing may have been lofty and optimistic, but it was notably absent of what critics might reject as “social engineering,” utopianism or even socialism. Instead, the language emphasized the rational, efficient, careful, thrifty aspects of planning. In a 1933 essay, “What is national planning?” Arthur Comey (who taught landscape architecture and planning at Harvard and helped found American City Planning Institute), emphasized this choice of chaos vs. order: “It would supersede planless drifting, subject to the blind or unrecognized forces of nature and personal goals, with a scheme and program of work distributed over a period of years which, we believe, however insufficient or immature it may be and however much in need of frequent revision, will result in far greater effectiveness of human effort and the saving of untold waste.” (Comey 1933, 164). He would use as a shining example the newly established TVA: “The plan for the Tennessee Valley aims at nothing less than the displacement of haphazard and chance development by a far-reaching program of social and economic planning.” (Comey 1933, 167). To choose planning therefore was not a flight towards utopian dreaming, but instead a logical and sturdy step towards efficiency.

Well-planned urban environments (the end goal of much of contemporary planning) were therefore often viewed not as an end in itself, but rather as a pragmatic means to an economic end: the Depression as a time to spend to create work and jobs and get the economy going again, and use planning to make sure this money is spent well and not thrown away: “A prerequisite is planning in order that we shall not make foolish and costly blunders. And this means present adequate expenditure for those agencies, official and non-official, qualified to do the planning. (John Ihlder, Executive Director, Pittsburgh Housing Association and Boston Housing Association, quoted in Buttenheim 1933, 74). In an era abundant with anti-urban sentiment and a lack of understanding of the urban condition in Washington (especially among Herbert Hoover, but even among FDR⁷), this more pragmatic approach to urban policy was likely the most politically effective. FDR himself seen pragmatically as one who might not have had a strong affection for cities but instead for aiding the people who lived in them (Gelfand 1975; Sitkoff 1985, 143). One might criticize many in the New Deal for not having a fully enlightened urban policy, but as Sitkoff warns: “In such a setting (of brutal poverty), the nation’s mayors were not calling for something that today would pass for sophisticated, comprehensive urban policy: to saddle Roosevelt and the New Deal with a 1980’s passes for judgment would be unfair. What then passed for an urban lobby ... focused upon joblessness and the need for public works” (Sitkoff 1985, 136).

⁷ Though FDR’s advisors/cabinet had more urban experience, such as Frances Perkins, Harry Hopkins, Harold Ickes) (Sitkoff 1985, 135).

The Challenge of Housing

One particular challenge of the New Deal policies was how to address the stark inadequacies of the American housing stock. The mixed record of New Deal housing efforts (Hunt 2003; von Hoffman 2005; Hunt 2005; Radford 1996) might well have foreshadowed the frustrated efforts and missteps of postwar housing. At the time was encouragement that the new wave of federal planning efforts would also advance US efforts in housing improvement: “Even more spectacular ... is the progress of 1933 in the assumption by government national, state, and local of leadership and responsibility in slum clearance and large-scale, low-rent housing projects” (Buttenheim 1934, 63). But the same author warns about getting too idealistically hopeful that the federal government and the public have wholeheartedly embraced a new era of public housing: “The historian would fain ascribe these remarkable developments national, state, and metropolitan to a sudden flowering of a heretofore slowly budding concern for the subnormal housing conditions of our American cities. Candor compels, however, the statement that the impetus appears to have come more from a desire to provide jobs than to provide houses and still more, perhaps, from the desire of states and cities to secure, for local spending, Federal funds that otherwise would go elsewhere” (Buttenheim 1934, 64). As with many New Deal programs, the emphasis (and greater political legitimacy) was rooted in creating jobs – a no-nonsense goal that might temporarily align itself with larger goals of housing but also just as soon find a new ally.

Concerns about the postwar situation and the continued need for planning

If in the early years of the Great Depression the planners were advocates of greater support and funding for their work in the larger national recovery effort, planners also expressed the concern that their efforts would be particularly needed to assist with peacetime adjustments (including dealing with industrial cities swollen with wartime employment soon to be idle). They also were concerned that neither the federal government nor the public would fully appreciate the need for postwar planning. In a January 1945 editorial in the *National Municipal Review*, Alfred Willoughby stated that “there are some instances in which the concentration of war industries has so completely upset normal conditions as to leave communities with postwar problems which will be difficult if not impossible for them to solve alone. Plans should be made now to give these places such help as they rightly deserve and the federal government should bear an appropriate share of the responsibility” (Willoughby 1945). In the same issue, the New York State comptroller saw two connected benefits of massive postwar funding for urban renewal: employing the millions of soon-idle wartime workers and clearing slums:

“One of the biggest problems confronting our country as we look forward to final victory in the present war is that of providing full employment after hostilities cease. Whether, as many believe, the pent-up demand for consumer goods will provide such employment in the immediate postwar years or whether, as others fear, the very reconversion itself from a wartime to a peacetime economy will bring an immediate unemployment problem, the fact remains that sooner or later we will have a real problem in providing employment. One of our greatest opportunities will be that of rebuilding the vast obsolete sections of our older cities. Actually our cities cannot long delay facing this problem because these areas threaten them with financial strangulation” (McGoldrick 1945, 5).

What is striking about these writings in the last year of the war is not the enthusiastic support for slum clearance, but how their advocacy of using condemnation to create superblocks and elevated highways is not apparently based in some abstract, universal belief in modernist architecture and urban design alone, but instead rooted in the very specific historical urgency they faced: a real fear that the end of the war would saddle cities with the dual challenge of massive, post-mobilization unemployment and a return to the substandard housing and infrastructural conditions of the Great Depression (whose root causes were never fully resolved by the New Deal, only displaced by the war).

What these planning advocates could likely not anticipate was the path that post-war planning would take, especially the rise of the cold war, the ideological battle against state planning (e.g., Hayek 1944), the boom in housing construction and suburbanization, the central role of race in urban politics, and the eventual rejection of slum clearance, modernist urban renewal and highway building not only by the public, but by their own professional successors.

A Contemporary Rescue Narrative for Planning? the Economic Crisis of 2008-9

Given the lofty (and perhaps more innocently ideological) rhetoric of the 1930s – and the historic events of the Great Depression and New Deal – it would not be surprising if the contemporary narrative about planning’s role in the current economic crisis would pale in comparison. Quite true. But there are some notable parallels in the narratives from the two periods: (a) the crisis can be remediated through sound planning intervention; (b) the crisis presents an opportunity for reform (not only of government policy and society in general, but of planning itself); (c) had sufficient planning & regulation been in place beforehand, the crisis may not have been so severe.

One sees this tone of “crisis as opportunity” in many guises, often with the tone of “we don’t just have to sit on our hands until the good times return; let’s seize the moment”:

We have not experienced a crisis of this magnitude since 'Black Friday' in 1929, when the stock market crash rocked the world economy. However, times of recession do not necessarily mean stagnation. In the field of public investment they instead provide an opportunity and a challenge to innovate. (Wiebking 2009)

There is also the view that the crisis has provided a moment of pause, allowing us to rethink in a period of reduced building projects. The APA created the National Infrastructure Investment Task Force (in late 2008) to make the link between the economic crisis and opportunities for planning – especially in infrastructure investment (transportation, water and wastewater, energy, telecommunications, public facilities and green infrastructure):⁸

"We find ourselves in a kind of perfect storm right at this moment," said Kurt Christiansen, director of economic development in the city of Azusa and the American Planning Association's California chapter president. "This is a prime opportunity to rebuild and reinvent. It is with the aim of seizing those opportunities -- and synthesizing the sundry

⁸ <http://www.planning.org/policy/infrastructure/>

projects, plans and resources involved -- that the American Planning Association (APA) has been holding field hearings nationwide for its 'Rebuilding America National Infrastructure Initiative'" (Rogers 2009).

An upcoming symposium at UCLA – appropriately titled “Economic Crisis as Opportunity for Reform (The Transportation – Land Use – Environment Connection)” uses the common advocacy rhetorical strategy of first dramatically painting the crisis in all its unpleasantness and then combining the *predictive* (times will lead to change) and the *prescriptive* (times should lead to change):

This is an unprecedented time. The depth of the economic downturn is historic, and its effects on cities, regions, land markets, and transportation systems are profound. Record foreclosures threaten the social and fiscal stability of cities, while those responsible for transportation systems face both deep budget cuts and expectations that increased transportation/infrastructure spending can help to stimulate the economy. Further, the specter of climate change has shifted debates over land use – transportation relationships and their role in a new, greener economy. New state legislation seeks to incorporate greenhouse gas emissions into planning practice, and some form of federal legislation is on the horizon. Amidst these economic and environmental challenges, however, are opportunities to effect fundamental changes to public policies and planning practice.⁹

This crisis moment is an also opportunity for reform, not just of the external world, but also for planning to clean house and to rethink its priorities (usually along more progressive lines of social justice and sustainability and material modesty):

And I see the gobsmacking crash and resulting flux as a rare limited-time-only opportunity to significantly update and reform the system and the habits of mind that are its cause and effect. Thus we now have a chance to remake our medical and energy and educational and urban planning systems along vastly more sensible lines. (Kurt Anderson, 2009)¹⁰

Witold Rybczynski recently told planning conventioners that this could well be the time to push for the post-excess city:

“The current global economic crisis and shifting priorities may provide an opportunity to rethink and scale down future buildings, including the single-family residence. The new architecture may focus more on being green or modest. But only the public will decide.” (Witold Rybczynski, 2009 National Planning Conference: Closing Keynote Address, summary by Joseph A. MacDonald, AICP)¹¹

The NY Metro Chapter of the APA also argues that the crisis allows the profession to slow down and shift planning back to its core goals (implying that economic boom periods tends to distract planning from its more progressive agendas):

⁹ Sunday, October 18th through Tuesday, October 20th 2009 at the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center

¹⁰ Quoted in Julie Lasky, *Design Observer*, Dialogues with Kurt Andersen and Douglas Rushkoff: Part I (7/30/09). <http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=9877>

¹¹ <https://www.planning.org/conference/previous/2009/coverage/closingsession.htm>

Planning in Challenging Economic Times: The current economic crisis has slowed most planning projects, (Stimulus notwithstanding) making it difficult to accomplish anything quickly. However, within this crisis there is an opportunity to take a step back and PLAN well, with an emphasis on sustainability, economic feasibility, environmental soundness and social equity.¹²

At its most ambitious level, these calls of crisis-leads-to-transformation envision the shift of planning from supporting the urban growth machine to building the sustainable, just city (that is, not just an increase in planning, but a shift in planning priorities – planning hasn't been absent from the boom years, but instead, unfortunately, part of the larger apparatus to build the speculative boomtown). Burkhalter and Castells call for a “new urban paradigm” to emerge from the crisis:

The global economic crisis has its roots in the speculative connection between the financial market and the housing market. The speculative schemes collapsed when the real estate bubble burst and the insolvency of the lending institutions was exposed. It followed the calling into question of the urban growth machine that has produced our flawed built environment in the last half century. Indeed, the crisis is not just financial or economic, but environmental, social and functional as well. It is the crisis of a model of urbanization that is not sustainable. Thus, in this emergency situation we feel compelled to engage a debate on the new ways of urban planning and urban policy appropriate for the 21st century city, both to manage the crisis and to change the metropolis beyond the crisis. However, the depth of the crisis offers an opportunity to rethink the metropolis and to implement new urban planning strategies focusing on people's needs and desires, and on environmental conservation, rather than on short-term profit (Burkhalter and Castells 2009).

Coming full circle, this belief that crisis will lead to more progressive cities (even including racial justice) is not unique to today. It can also be found in the 1930s, as one author spoke about the future of Texas cities after the depression:

The depression will ultimately prove to be an untold blessing to the cause of city building for our more progressive Texas communities. ... Let us admit at the beginning that we are entering into a new age in city building. The popular city-building methods that were in vogue back in the "twenties" will fail to go over in the "thirties" and the "forties." ... Then the depression came and saved us. To be sure, this wild spree of spending public funds would have stopped of itself sooner or later. But in the meantime many cities, towns, and counties would have faced bankruptcy but for the merciful intervention of the depression. We shall never know the number of cities and counties which were saved from self-destruction by the coming of the depression. ... The new standard for 'The Best City' will give chief consideration to sanitary and living conditions of districts occupied by negroes, Mexicans, and the poor whites. (Surratt 1932, 203-4).

¹² APA NY Metro Chapter, Conference Announcement: “Student and Professional Biennial Conference: Planning for the NY Region in Challenging Economic Times (09/25/2009 - 09/26/2009)”
<https://www.planning.org/ecommerce/conference/viewConferenceDetails.aspx?conferenceId=101>

Context Matters: Comparing the Great Depression and the Current Economic Crisis

The simple difference between the two eras is that the Great Depression was longer and deeper than the current crisis (at least so far...). We have also (hopefully) learned from the Depression's missteps. FDR came 3+ years into the depression, they had less economic precedent or knowledge to deal with the crisis, they incrementally developed projects in an experimental and somewhat blind way, and historians generally view the funding as having been inadequate to alone pull the country out of depression (the war did that). By contrast, the Obama efforts came quickly, with more funding (though arguably still not enough), and with greater economic knowledge and the legacy of the Great Depression as a precedent (Marks 2008). Or perhaps the government today can more easily respond with regulatory and policy interventions that, compared to New Deal recovery policies, are less tied to city planning and public works (e.g., banking regulation, bank bailouts, etc.).

Yet the more complex (and interesting) difference is the context: the other events, institutions and social forces around it.¹³ The differences are well-known, but worth summarizing with a series of contrasts between the 1930s and today:

- from central city to metroplex suburbia; from a nation that had just gone through the rural-urban transformation to a nation that had just gone through the urban-suburban shift.
- from industrialization to services, from national to global economies.
- from early auto era (planners viewing autos as an innovative new urban technology) to late auto era (planners viewing autos as a threat to urbanism)
- from garden cities and greenbelt communities as alternatives to overcrowded cities to new urbanist communities as alternatives to suburban sprawl
- from progressive support for housing reform, for public housing, for townless highways, for dams, New Towns, for zoning, urban renewal, etc. (an ambitious, youthful, modernist agenda) to progressive support for social justice, sustainability, green design.
- An excitement and focus in building this new field of planning around being comprehensive, around scientific analysis, zoning, linking physical planning to budgets (urban fiscal management) to a more nuanced field that is a hybrid of modern and postmodern, scientific and communicative-constructivist.
- From real estate speculation excesses (especially in Florida) to real estate speculation excesses (especially in Florida) (Galbraith 1979).
- from terrible housing conditions (slums, overcrowding, lack of heat, sanitation, low home ownership, too small housing, etc.) to terrible housing market (mortgage crisis, too large houses, etc.).
- from the historic entry of the federal government into what was once seen as a largely local issue of urban development to a more complicated environment where local, regional, state and federal options have all already been tried – and their appropriate mix still debated. (with a skepticism towards federal action still present).
- from fear of too much central government and socialism to fear of too much central government (and the continued use of socialism as a derogatory term).

¹³ An institutional view of the profession's support would be more complex than the abstract formula: support for planning = f (depth and duration of economic crisis)

For the Great Depression, the key concepts are Keynesianism, massive poverty and unemployment, the lack of a public safety net, and the coming war. It was also a time of great public works, which were then the confluence of the need for infrastructure, make work and fiscal Keynesian policies (nicely linked to notions of modernization and visions of the mass public) – all that nicely supported the growing importance/stature of planning. Public works allows for federal policy to be translated into local planning. That constellation of 1930s forces, alliances and institutions no longer exists in its original formulation.

Public works provided both immediate employment and long-term benefits of the infrastructure improvements themselves.¹⁴ This dual benefit was evoked for public support for the spending. (For example, the cover of the January 1933 issue of *The American City* – a monthly magazine targeted at municipal engineers – featured the new \$18 million viaduct connecting Jersey City and Newark and proclaimed: “Thousands of men, both directly on the construction and indirectly in plants furnishing materials, were given employment in these critical times on this huge project of last public benefit...” (1933) The journal also emphasized the importance of “continued federal aid” for road construction (ibid, 5).

Is there now a new, more skeptical view of public works? Some have argued that the old era of massive public works unhindered by public opposition is no longer viable in this era of citizen input, environmental review and multiple levels of regulatory scrutiny (see, for example, Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter 2003). We still spend massive amounts of money on public works, but they seem to have lost much of their larger power as a vision of urban progress, modernization and a movement towards the greater collective good. Nevertheless, allocating large-scale public works projects still drive much of (pork-barrel) politics.

Overall, the context of the Great Depression was radically different than today, not only in terms of the state of the national economy and national policy, but particularly in the nature of urbanization and especially the status and evolutionary stage of the planning profession. As noted earlier, the Great Depression and New Deal arrived just as the American planning field was finding its footing, establishing itself through conferences, associations and journals, and testing its authority in the courts. If the modern field of planning was born in the 1893-1909 era, then it was coming into its own in the 1920s. The field was young and planners celebrated the first expansion of their profession through the sheer increase in planning commissions, planning laws, and university planning programs) (see, for example, Bütünheim 1931, 101). For planners, the Great Depression was not only a period of great need and opportunity, but represented the timely confluence of their own professional ascent and the need for their professional skills by the larger world around them. Timing was important: the New Deal and Depression followed directly on the heels of a decade of planning’s growth and institutionalization as a profession – so not only was the idea, but also the structure of planning, in place – albeit somewhat nascent and latent and small, but ready to expand (and take advantage of new urgency and federal funding).

And today? The field, though growing or at least expanding its range, is more mature and less concerned with establishing itself as a profession, and more concerned with gaining the political support and resources to carry out its agendas. The field is more nested and embedded

¹⁴ For a good review of the role of public works in the New Deal, see (Smith 2006). For a history of the WPA, see (Taylor 2008).

in a range of local, regional, state, and federal institutions -- public, non-profit and private. Planning today is both more established and more diffuse, diverse and multi-faceted: it's harder today to make a call for more planning since it means so many different things. (And there are now far more voices that speak for a range of meanings and agendas for planning. No longer can one easily identify a central voice for planning, as might the journal *City Planning* represented in the 1930s.)

The other palpable difference between the narratives of the 1930s and today is the self-awareness of what the planning profession is: in the 1930s the field was new, young, somewhat innocent and viewed itself as maturing just in time to aid the New Deal – and would emerge as a larger, more ambitious and more contentious field. By contrast, contemporary planning advocates do not apparently need to call for the creation of their field (it is already somewhat mature), but instead to more incrementally call for its increased influence and redirection.

That said, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 did energize and invigorate the planning debate in powerful ways. It is not simply the ebb and flow of crises that may shape planning opportunities, but also what other events, leaders, forces and institutions are in place at the time of the crisis. In 2008-9, it was not merely the economic crisis in financial and mortgage markets that led to a sense of urgency for planners, but crucially the Bush to Obama transition that catalyzed the sense of hope in the possibility of major change and resurgence in planning. In an editorial in *Planning* magazine, Paul Farmer wrote:

It's hard to think of a time when change was as eagerly anticipated as it is today. "Change we can believe in" proved to be a winning message for President-elect Barack Obama. APA President Robert Hunter, FAICP, frequently challenges planners to play leadership roles in guiding one type of change - growth. And with this issue, Planning undergoes its greatest change in two decades.

What changes can we expect from the new administration? We're going to see the greenest president since Teddy Roosevelt, the most equity-focused president since FDR, and the most nonpartisan president since Eisenhower. Of course, we are also in the midst of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Our expectations are high for this new president, as are the world's. Will realities overwhelm a planning agenda? I would argue that realities actually require a planning agenda (Farmer 2009).

The Cyclical and the Structural of the New Deal

The New Deal policies (e.g., stimulus funds, make-work projects, etc.) were targeted to counteract the huge cyclical downturn in the American economy starting in 1929. And yet many of the New Deal policies also had larger structural goals: to tackle the poverty, underdevelopment, and inefficiencies that predated the Depression and had been a source of misery for many long before the stock market crash of Black Friday. The New Deal was in a way also a set of development policies to modernize America's cities, infrastructure, factories and farms. It was linked to the belief in progress as a way out of poverty and underdevelopment.

A vivid example of this dual cyclical/structural nature of New Deal policies was the Tennessee Valley Authority (Selznick 1966; Martin 1956; Lilienthal 1944; Clapp 1955; Hargrove and Conkin 1983). Though the Depression hit the valley hard, the larger goals of the TVA went well beyond anti-cyclical stimulus efforts. These were long-term structural

development strategies: bringing rural areas out of poverty through electrification, roads, irrigation, etc.). By contrast, much of the discussion and policies about the contemporary crisis of 2008-9 seems to be more cyclical in nature. Yes, there is talk of structural reform of banking and housing, but not in the same fundamental way that rural electrification, for example, was to address both the immediate crisis of the depression and the longer-term problems of rural poverty and underdevelopment.¹⁵ This confluence of structural-cyclical strategies gave the New Deal a distinctive, longer-term objective – linking getting out of the crisis to a larger agenda of economic, technical and social progress. Though not a planner or architect, the writer H.G. Wells still felt compelled to comment on the need to rethink and remake the structure of cities as a way out of the Depression. In speaking to a reporter in New York, Wells said:

" I'll chuck in one thing you haven't asked me, as it happens to be an obsession or mine. That is that collective enterprise in the rebuilding of cities is the only way to fill up the gap between overproduction and limited consumption. New forms of employment must be found, and the obvious thing is to consider the immense architectural possibilities. We must accept the responsibility of rehousing all of mankind, rebuilding cities, and reclaiming the roads and countrysides. Community work is necessary" (New York Times, Oct 15, 1931, reprinted in Adams 1932).

For today's crisis, we may be missing a real opportunity to discuss what the next stage in American development policy should be. Whether the vision of developmental progress is towards sustainability, social justice, a new era of reinvented post-industrial cities (e.g., Detroit), one might well push the current discussion beyond merely what is the right counter-cyclical spending program to debate the long-term consequences of these massive spending efforts. Recent analysis of transportation funding from the current federal stimulus programs do highlight the missed opportunities of spending: these funds are disproportionately going for new roads in non-metropolitan areas rather than repairs of older roads, arguably encouraging sprawl and not aiding the revitalization of older central cities (Cooper and Palmer 2009; Norquist 2009).¹⁶

Conclusion

Will planning's response to the current economic crisis (and the nation's response to planning) be different today from the response in the 1930s? The simple answer is yes: the current crisis is not (so far) as deep or long as the Great Depression, there is more regulation in place than in 1929, and also the federal government has responded much faster this time around than last. That is the easy answer. The more complicated – and arguably more interesting -- answer, as we have seen, lies in the different context and constellation of interests and forces shaping planning in the 1930s and today.

¹⁵ To illustrate this dual role of the New Deal to address not only the depression but also underdevelopment, consider this letter written in the field in 1934 (reporting on the TVA): "Out of nearly 70,000 families on relief in Tennessee, probably 30,000 or more live in small towns or in the country. Many of these are in abandoned lumber and mining camps. Most of them who are farmers apparently are living on sub-marginal or marginal land. Fairly typical, for Western Tennessee, I gather, was a district I visited yesterday. Table land. Thin soil. Terrible housing. Illiteracy. Evidence of prolonged undernourishment. No knowledge of how to live decently or farm profitably if they had decent land." Letter from journalist Lorena Hickok (from the Field) to Harry L. Hopkins (FDR advisor), Florence, Alabama June 6, 1934.

¹⁶ One mechanism leading to this unfortunate outcome is state-level intervention in the funding allocation.

Let me conclude with several points:

1. The 1930s was the confluence of planning coming of age and the emergency pressures placed on planning from the New Deal and the war. That combination made for a crucible of planning development that was historically unique. The state of planning today is more mature, and the impact of the crisis today on planning development will be less, not only because the current crisis is (hopefully) shorter and shallower than the Great Depression, but also because planning has less at stake (in terms of its own professional status). Planners at the beginning of the 1930s were already engaged in articulating rational, systematic arguments for the need for planning, and this dove-tailed with the rise of the New Deal. Local planners may not have been at the core of the New Deal, but they saw allies, similarities and available resources in the larger movement.
2. Crises can lead to the creation of planning institutions that outlive the crisis. This may be due to institutional inertia (bureaucracies tend to be self-protective and resist abolition), or due to the public's acceptance of the benefits of these institutions even after the crisis has passed. (The TVA is one example – and as we noted earlier, it served both cyclical and structural/developmental goals.) Sometimes these institutions may be effective, and sometimes not. But planners might well learn the lesson that some planning institutions can only be established during small windows of opportunity (such as times of massive federal stimulus spending and rapid legislative approval of new agencies).
3. Another surprise in rereading the planning narratives from the Great Depression was the tone of their ambitions. Yes, we tend to think of this as the era of Le Corbusier (and view planners all in his shadow of influence); but these planners did not display the stereotype of high modernism hubris. Instead, their words revealed a rather more modest, upbeat, careful tone of efficiency, being rational, careful, prudent, thrifty – stressing planning as an antidote to excessive costs, inefficiencies, irrational mix of uses, etc. This cautious, diplomatic tone may in part have been a façade to gain public acceptance and overcome a public wary of excessive government planning. (And behind seemingly calm tones of scientific reason can hide aggressive ambition.) But the tone also reminds us that our planning histories sometimes create strawman images of the so-called high-modernist past to exaggerate our own contemporary post-modern wisdom and insight.
4. The current tension in planning between the aesthetic, the administrative, and the economic impulses may have its roots in this New Deal Era, with planning emerging from the 1920s as a modest local-based profession focusing on physical planning and then its expansion/transformation in the 1930s into economic planning at a large national scale, then whipsawed in the 1940s by both wartime mobilization and then the cold war anti-planning fears and rhetoric. Add to this the dual traumas of the Depression and the war on the American psyche. In addition, the early disputes over the appropriate role of housing reform, public housing advocacy and slum clearance (sometimes integrated, sometimes at odds) also set up an early internal tension within planning that lives on today. Planning histories often view the origins of these tensions in during the urban

crisis of the 1960s, with battles between technocratic and advocacy/political approaches to planning – all against the backdrop of the civil rights and anti-war movements, and the upheaval in social theory and scientific thinking of the era. Yes, these debates happened in the 1960s, but much of the discussion happened 30 years earlier as well.

5. A vivid characteristic of these New Deal planning narratives is how quickly and dramatically the field adjusted to the sudden surge of planning activity, authority and resources during the FDR years. Did the 1929 – 1945 era send the young field of planning down an alternative path: with a more expansive and ambitious portfolio (integrating housing, physical, economic and infrastructural planning) that both made the field more interesting and wider but also more open to political opposition and internal strife? (The alternative path would have been to continue its 1920s path towards a more narrowly defined profession, closer to architecture and civil engineering?) Rather than seeing the 1960s/1970s as a time when planning expanded and threatened fragmentation between the technical/physical and the social/theoretical (Davidoff 1965), did this schism really began in the 1930s?

6. Crises therefore not only lead to a possible increase in planning, but also a redirection: both progressive aspirations (e.g., “now we can implement a progressive planning agenda”) and also pragmatic and compromises (some of the more progressive ideas from Mumford’s RPAA being excluded from New Deal policies). In its history, planning is not static, rising and falling like a buoy, but instead gets transformed, adapted, etc. by crises. Planning gets shaped and redirected based on the specific political battles it wages, and the alliances it builds.

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