A Glance at the Relations between Baltimore's Community Organizations and the City Administration in Physical Planning Issues.

1. Introduction

Baltimore has been known as a City of neighborhoods. Indeed, history has shown very active ones at that. In Switzerland, urban neighborhoods also have begun to politically organize themselves; consequently cities are testing different models of how of dealing with this phenomena. Sometimes cities are really interested in having these organizations as real partners in formulating public policy, but often merely to shift the responsibility on their shoulders. Baltimore's experience was a great occasion to learn from.

There have been two parts in the course of my work. First I had to get an idea of the political organization and of the physical layout of the city, and of neighborhood and other community based organizations. I started by interviewing staff people of umbrella organizations, of the planning department, of the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and members of some neighborhood organizations. At the same time I took classes in planning theory and in community planning, and completed the respective readings with readings on neighborhood sociology [20, 21, 32], history of Baltimore [3, 27], and on community organizing [1, 2, 15, 16, 24].

I came to three points of discussion as follows:

1. A large part of the communication between neighborhoods and city administration occurs with officials at a relatively low level in the administration hierarchy but with a high professional standard.

2. Almost all the neighborhood organizations seem to be satisfied somehow, partly by organizational and legal measures that facilitate their participation, partly by a share of the money that flows from the federal government through the city in the area of Community Development.
3. Baltimore seems to have been quite successful in getting a fair share of the federal money, in working together with the communities, at last in the last 14 years, in having used money in a generally, rather well appreciated way, without gross misuse as in some cities, and in giving up general "slum clearances" as occurred in the fifties and sixties.

Finally I tried to discuss and test these points. As I did not have enough time personal education and resources to verify these points in a survey or by a sampled study, I tried to get better evidence by observing three neighborhood associations in more depth, and by interviewing more people active in their neighborhood, city officials, staff people in umbrella and other community related organizations, confronting them directly with my points. This procedure led to modifications of my statements, which might now be used as a starting point for a broader research.

2. Basics on Baltimore's City Administration and Neighborhoods.

2.1 The City Administration

The organization of the city administration can best seen in several publications [9,10]. I only repeat some important points related to my field. The city has a strong Mayor system. The Mayor sits together with two of his commissioners and two elected officials in the Board of Estimates.

The Planning Department and the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) are the two main agencies that work in physical planning. The Planning Department elaborates the five years Capital Improvement Program and the yearly Capital Budget. It makes the citywide planning, and the detail planning in the areas that are not in HCD's domain. All housing and building related issues are concentrated in HCD: public housing, code enforcement, building inspection, and especially planning in all Urban Renewal Areas (URA). HCD prepares the city's application for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and is in this function also a most important citywide agency.

Both agencies have a special organization scheme for their work with the community associations:

- The Planning Department has a District Planner and an assistant for each of the six councilmanic districts. The District Planner is a very important information link
between his communities and various agencies. He has an astonishing freedom and competences to work directly and informally with other agencies and with the elected officials, especially with his councilpersons.

- At HCD, there are 6 planners at the planning division working with the communities. Each one is responsible for several URAs. There are also several project managers at the division for Project Management, each working with several URAs. So, each PAC relates to one project manager and to one planner. Generally, the project manager, who monitors implementation, has more frequent relations to his groups.

Both planning agencies' offices are centralized. Other agencies as Social Services have decentralized offices out in the communities also, and the Mayor's Representatives and neighborhood offices of several departments are located in about ten Multi-Purpose Centers.

2.2 Baltimore's Neighborhoods.

Baltimore's neighborhoods are a kind of a myth. Everybody tells you that Baltimore is the city of the ethnic neighborhoods. In fact, there are still some parts of the city where you strongly feel the ethnic clusters of the immigrant time, as in some east-european or italian areas of East Baltimore, or the former mill town, as in Hampden; and I often met people who almost have not got out of their larger neighborhood during their whole life. Social classes and races are heavily segregated.

It is very interesting to hear about the newer history of Baltimore's neighborhoods by different witnesses. Most of them saw the start of neighborhood movement near to the time they got involved in. ("Before there were some..."). But Olson [27] reports a convention of neighborhood organizations already at the beginning of the century.

One of the first roots of the modern neighborhood organizations seems to have been initiated by the slum removal movement of the forties and fifties, represented in Baltimore by the Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA). CPHA was a very influential organization in those days. The Baltimore Plan, an early Urban Renewal model was developed there, and many of Baltimore's present leaders got there planning education there. CPHA initiated many of the neighborhood Improvement Associations instead of the then predominant protective civic associations. But the actual neighborhood movement starts in the sixties with two main innovations: the federally funded and staffed neighborhood organizations in the black neighborhoods [3,27] and
the umbrella organizations.

Due to the flaws of the early slum removal and urban renewal programs and to the heavily criticized effects of displacement and of the anonymous environment in big highrise public housing, neighborhood participation in the decision process got mandatory in later federal programs. From another side, the civil rights movement and the activity of the Community Action Agency had got to neighborhood based offices and groups. But still, e.g. in the Gay street Urban Renewal Area, often almost the whole population was displaced and exchanged.

The first umbrella organizations were founded about two different issues. North East Community Organization (NECO) was an effort, mainly by the churches of that part of the city, to slow down the stampede of the white population to the suburbs. Frightened by the in move of blacks to their neighborhoods, they sold their houses at dumping prices to real estate speculators and landlords who accumulated hundreds of houses. Many of the moving blacks had been displaced by the urban renewals or where socially upwards mobile people who were angry to become homeowners. The speculators took advantage of their desire and sold the cheaply bought houses at usurious prices. This mechanism was amplified by methods as "blockbusting" and big sales announcements, both to accelerate the runaway movement. NECO tried to slow down the run away of the whites by demonstrating the mechanisms, by denouncing obvious speculations and by generally lowering the fears of the whites through churches and community organizations and was successful in getting a law forbidding real estate sales posters in their area.

The South East Community Organization (SECO) and the Coalition of the Peninsula Organizations (COPO) had grown out of a coalition of various associations that fighted to save their neighborhoods from being destroyed or cut by two connected freeway projects [15, p14-20]. Since, one of the projects, an extension of I-83, has first been radically changed and finally has been given up formally this year. The other one, I-95, has undergone a radical change and will be finished in 1984.

Other umbrella organizations followed. Johns Hopkins University was the initiator of the Greater Homewood Community Corporation which, funded first by some big institutions (university, insurance corporation, hospitals) should improve the relations of these institutions to the surrounding neighborhood associations, and create an organization that was able to study and formulate the needs and intentions of the neighborhoods. "Abell: Looking Ahead" [23] is one of the created reports.

With the creation of the new Department of Housing and Community Development in 1968 under commissioner Robert C. Embry,
the city’s policy towards all the mentioned community organizations changed substantially. Many of these organizations was funded for staff at least for certain projects. The city tried to coopt them rather than to fight them, and to delegate certain planning and service delivery tasks down to them. This policy helped to spread the umbrella organizations over a big portion of the city. It seems to me that in the black areas, after the election of the present Mayor, less militant groups were funded and recognized as Project Area Committees (PAC) in Urban Renewal Areas, such coopting the leaders and isolating the more radical people around the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

Today, Baltimore has a broad variety of community organizations, from block associations to umbrella organizations that represent one hundred thousand people, from those that meet twice a year to organizations with several full and part time staff.

The Community Association Directory [8] is the most up-to-date directory of these organizations. The neighborhoods in a stricter sense, are defined, listed and shown on a map in Taylor [31]. There and in Taylor’s Census Note 2 [30], you also find demographic data about these neighborhoods. The CPHA Handbook [18] lists many examples of activities done by different organizations.

3. Carrollton Circle Civic Association’s Rezoning Proposal

The reasons for the choice of this case were a very active and well informed District Planner, a closed issue that could be observed until the end during my stage, and a potential conflict between overlapping neighborhood associations (that finally did not break out, because the old association is no longer active).

3.1 The Neighborhood.

The neighborhood adjoins the original B&O railroad tracks on the north, west of Monroe street. Along the the neighborhood and generally in the southern part of the neighborhood, there are some industries. Almost all residential buildings are rather small row houses, built for B&O workers at the turn of the century. The lots are generally small, there is little green. Some blocks are very clean, some others are not. There are some sporadic boarded houses, most of them former corner stores.
3.2 The Community Organization.

The association has been founded four years ago, sponsored by the South West Baltimore umbrella organization Communities Organized Improve Life (COIL). There are only about 30 members, meeting monthly. Membership is lost when more than two consecutive meetings are not attended. Almost all members are home owners. Two women seem to be real key persons who bring in the suggestions for most activities, and who have a quite precise idea of future objectives. They testified at both hearings and must be seen as the promoters of the rezoning. One of them is the associations secretary, the other is also a member of the local Democratic Club (which is affiliated with the Stonewall Club of former State Senator McGuirk). Other active people are the president, the treasurer and a retired man, owner of some houses, who also testified at both hearings.

The goal of the actives is a good neighborhood and their main objective is higher house values. They say that most tenants do not want to cooperate (e.g. in alley cleaning actions), and consider them as trash. By higher house values, the active people hope to get more home owners and better tenants.

3.3 The Proposed Rezoning

The rezoning proposal was the most important objective in the associations last year's program. The southern part of the neighborhood has been zoned M-2-2, that is for medium industrial use. But a large potion of that zone is actually residential, row houses. Rezoning corresponding to the actual use would not allow non residential use of the houses, such preventing the neighbors from immissions and discouraging speculation and desinvestment. So it would be an important condition for stabilizing and fostering property values.

The association suggested the idea to the District Planner. As she found it convenient, a letter was sent to the Planning Department in April 1982, requesting a zoning analysis for the southern part of the neighborhood. Since the M-2-2 zone encompassed more than this neighborhood, the department extended the study area. The result was a report [13], proposing to
reduce the M-2-2 zone and to rezone the row house blocks to R-8. This zone allows the smallest single-family houses, without stimulating apartment houses. At the same time, the Planning Department prepared a bill for a corresponding ordinance which was eventually introduced by the councilmen of the sixth district in fall 1982. The issue had been discussed and the bill was backed in community meetings. The also affected neighborhood to the west is not organized and the neighborhood organization to the east, Old South-East Community, has become virtually inexistent. The property owners got a letter informing them about the bill and about the coming hearing before the planning commission.

3.4 The Observed Events.

The events I could observe were a hearing before the Planning Commission, a meeting of the association, a hearing before the city council’s Judiciary Committee, and the second reader of the bill in the City Council. The bill was finally approved by the City Council in a third reader. I made two interviews with the District Planner (in the beginning and before the second hearing), an interview with the two key women after the second reader, and talked to people before and after the events.

3.4.1 The Hearing before the Planning Commission.

Before the hearing, the District Planner shortly spoke to several people in the lobby. I got the impression that a briefing had occurred before. At the hearing, the district planner explained the present situation, the request and the reasoning of the civic association and the conclusions that had lead to the bill. She asserted the due information of the property owners, reporting that she had got thirty phone calls in favor of the bill, three informational calls without an opinion expressed and three objections by business property owners, and that Carrollton Circle Civic Association was in favor. One of the district’s councilmen explained the main concerns of the association members, but supposed other people might not have got due attention, and said that he was willing to hear them.

The first opponent was an owner of a motor cycle shop who had invested 40 000 $ in his business four years ago. He had been forced to have it in a industrial zone. He feared he could not sell his business after the rezoning. he complained about having got the letter only two days ago, having never been informed and asked before, and that meetings had not been posted at his big bill board or nearby. (His shop is outside the associations borders, but in the rezoned area.) The second opponent was the lawyer of a commercial used property, in a row of houses, but adjacent at the rear to a manufactory that was to remain M-2-2.
He claimed to let the whole block industrial, as the adjacent houses were in bad shape. A third's property was not affected by the rezoning and a fourth did not object, but complained about not having been informed, and stated that the proposal had never been favored by the neighbors and was only promoted by the haphazard association.

People in favor, all members of the association, confirmed the known arguments. An owner of several rented properties tries to keep them neat. He fears that the community declines if commercial users begin to penetrate. He already has troubles with a garage that is used for auto repair. A woman, home owner and living in the neighborhood, wants to keep the neighborhood stable.

The commission recommends to consider an amendment in the second case which would include the commercially used property in the M-2-2 zone.

3.4.2 The Neighborhood Meeting.

The neighborhood meeting of February 21st was attended by ca 18 people of the neighborhood (I think that almost all but a new black homeowner were members), two city officials, namely the District Housing Inspector and the District Planner, and three representatives of the umbrella organization COIL. Rezoning was not the main issue of the meeting. The district planner reported upon the hearing before the Planning Commission and upon an agreement about an amendment with the second complaining business property owner. She announced the coming hearing before the judiciary committee of the city council and emphasized the importance of showing up there. The hearing would be posted in the neighborhood at least during two weeks. The president feared that the association might be sued for the rezoning issue by owners outside the associations area, but the district planner asserted that the extension had been made by the agency and that rezoning was an official act of public law.

Other issues at the meeting were fund raising, interna that clearly showed the generally less skilled membership, a short hearing with the housing inspector, and a presentation by COIL on their service programs, including a call to participate as tutors in an illiterate teaching program.

3.4.3 The Hearing before the City Council's Judiciary Committee.

About a dozen people showed up. First, the communications of the different agencies were read. The district planner stated that the hearing had been announced properly in the newspapers and in a letter sent to all property owners, and had been posted at six
sites in the neighborhood for two weeks. She shortly introduced the proposals and reported upon the amendments made since the last hearing to settle two complaints. Four association members favored the bill, one of them with an example showing that a neighbor could not even get a permission to fix a fence, as he was in a non residential zone.

Two new opponents testified. One was a woman who feared a loss, as her house that had included a corner store two generations ago, might no longer be sold as a potential business property. The legal possibilities of reopening a store, and the presumed differences in property values were shortly discussed. The other opposed the mentioned amendment, if his adjacent (poorly maintained) row houses were not also included in the amendment (that means staying M-2-2).

3.4.4 The Second Reader in the City Council.

The bill passed without any discussion. It seems to have done so also at the third reader, two weeks later.

3.5 Remarks to This Case Study.

The Planning Department’s approach to this neighborhood is purely incremental. In some neighborhoods as e.g. around Johns Hopkins Homewood campus, neighborhood plans have been made, listing at least certain problems and concerns of the neighborhood, and suggesting certain solutions or measures to be taken. This proceeding allowed a more comprehensive look and a broader public discussion of the problems. Here, in this rather poor neighborhood, it seems that the two key women have a rather clear idea of a series of measures that would lead to their goals, namely to the rising of property values and to getting rid of the bad (noisy or filthy) renters by higher rents and increase in home ownership. The neighborhood garden on a formerly neglected railroad lot; the deal with a recently moved in factory, getting the outside painted in a color chosen by the neighbors and trees planted for a consent to a zoning exemption; better trash collection and trash baskets on the sidewalks; and finally the rezoning, have been steps in a plan whose next steps would be to get the neighborhood declared as a historic district, and residential permit parking. It is interesting that the two women only propose the next step after the last one is done.

Carrollton Circle Civic Association seems to be an extreme case of Creson’s findings [19], that successful neighborhood organizations are often run by more privileged people in an unprivileged neighborhood. Here, the organization does not deliver services itself, but through concentration on well defined problems, is successful in using the organizational and
procedural possibilities of the city.

The District Planner is in close contact with most community organizations of her district and with the councilmen. She finds it more difficult to work with the more influential neighborhoods that are already privileged and try to get more in a often arrogant manner. These people often try to get things that have got low priority in the Planning Department, through direct intervention on the highest levels.

The studied case shows a close but classical form of cooperation; The neighborhood, represented by a small minority brings a request. the professionals at the agency try to fulfill it while considering a general interest, and then use the neighborhood organization as leverage to get the proposal through the political process.

4. Abell Improvement Association’s Parking Problems.

The reasons for this choice were: I lived near this neighborhood and I liked to know about my immediate surrounding. Also, in Switzerland, we have similar problems in many neighborhoods. Local efforts to install something like a Residential Permit Parking in the city of Bern have been stopped by the federal administration. A bill to change the law is hanging in parliament.

4.1 The Neighborhood

The neighborhood is at the north-eastern corner of Charles Village, between 29th and 33th street, adjacent to the Waverly business district along Greenmount Avenue. The western border to Charles Village is not clear, and the areas of the two community organizations overlap. In the borders as defined by Taylor [30], the population diminished from 1480 in 1970 to 1120 in 1980, the black portion diminishing more from 23% in 1970 to 18% in 1980 [31].

Some blocks on Barclay Street, partly row houses, partly single frame houses, have traditionally been hold by black tenants. During the last years, some of them have been displaced by white homebuyers. On the other hand, few blacks moved into the traditionally white row house blocks in the western area. Several houses are occupied by groups of Hopkins students. Almost all houses are row houses. East of Barclay street there are a few blocks of isolated frame houses. In the western part there are some small apartment buildings, and many of the bigger
houses are divided in more than one dwelling unit.

4.2 The Neighborhood Organization.

Abell Improvement Association has been founded in 1971 in opposition to Charles Village Civic Association. The founders stated that the Charles Village Association could not address their specific problems, and they did not feel as fancy and wealthy. Their main interest was not in rising property values which was a mixed blessing for the tenants and the older homeowners. Rather they worked on local problems as trash in alleys, problems with absent landowners and tree planting, and they fought against the "big" around: A hotel project immediately adjacent on formerly residentially used land, Johns Hopkins University, Memorial Hospital, and sometimes the city that generally favored the bigger’s intents, and Carles Village Civic Association whose relations to the city and to developers were considered as too good.

The association has currently about 150 members. The annual fee is $2. Besides the board there is a small permanent committee that maintains the playground, a committee for residential parking and a new committee of block representatives to introduce and carry the neighborhood watch project.

The most active person is the secretary, Maria Lombardi, who has moved into the neighborhood in the forties as a young woman. She seems to be the person who is active at large. She organizes people for certain tasks, she invites to the meetings in her house, she knows to gather information and asks her son who lives now in another state, about planning legislation. (The son had been one of the most active fighters against the hotel project during the seventies and got a planner degree mainly for the purpose of being accepted as an expert by the counterpart.) Other people are active in certain tasks (e.g. in playground maintenance, in the fight against the development for residential purposes of the former telephone building, or in the neighborhood watch program), but the secretary really seems to be the moving force.

4.3 The Issues During the Period of my Observation

Unlike Carrolton Circle, a neighborhood planning study has been made by Greater Homewood Community Association for Abell in 1979. It mainly lists problems and suggests solutions to some of them. Most problems are related to the surrounding neighbors: trash problems and neglect at the Greenmount business district, parking problems caused mainly by the employees of Memorial Hospital and
by the Johns Hopkins University, continuing threat by a hotel project that could still be built under the present zoning regulations, and through traffic in pure residential streets causing a security hazard especially at crossings and for playing children.

Most of the report's suggestions have not yet been realized: The relations to the Greenmount Business Association are better now. Recently its new chairman moved into the Abell neighborhood and has become a member of the Abell Improvement Association. The hotel project has been prevented rather by the depression than by rezoning, and remains a potential point of conflict. (The proposed rezoning has not been deferred by the city, despite the broad support by all surrounding neighborhood associations and a positive study by the Planning Department.) Traffic reorganization did not find support in the neighborhood, strong enough to move something.

But one of the reports proposals, the introduction of Residential Permit Parking was the main issue in the associations agenda for this year. A fight against the transformation of a former telephone building into an apartment building was related to the same problem of not enough parking space for the residents. My observations covered mainly these two issues.

4.3.1 Residential Permit Parking

The nuisance of commuters parking in residential areas near to major working places called for different regulations for residents and non residents. An 1979 ordinance of the City Council on residential permit parking [11] authorizes the Department of Transport and Traffic to limit the parking time for non residents in certain areas, residents being exempt from the limitations by a residential parking permit. The ordinance lays down the requirements for residential permit parking areas, and detailed regulations describe the procedure to get it installed [11]:

To initiate the procedure you have to file a petition to the Department of Transport and Traffic that shows the support of a majority of the households in an area of a minimum of ten block street sides. After checking the majority and minimum area requirements, the department forwards the petition to the Planning Department that has to check the technical requirements, as a minimum occupancy of the parking space and the proportion of non resident parkers during day and night time, for each of the proposed street sides. It also has to consider if an expansion of the proposed zone into more streets would prevent the problem from simply being shifted there. If all conditions are fulfilled, the department's proposal comes to a hearing in the neighborhood, where a final vote decides over the introduction of
the residential permit parking zone.

When I first came to the Association in December, it had already decided to start the petition, a petition form had been designed and a committee of volunteers, each responsible for the signatures of one block side had been assigned. This committee just started to distribute a informing leaflet to every household. Gathering the signatures took longer than expected, some of the responsible people got sick and were unable to do their duty, several streets were not complete, and as the main coordinator, the association’s secretary wanted to have a complete coverage of the households, it took her and some friends quite a while to complete all the lists. Finally, over 95% of all households had signed in favor of the Residentals Permit Parking. A few were against it because of the permit fee, a few because they were convinced that public streets had to be open for everybody, a few were connected to the Memorial Hospital and a few could not be reached.

On march first, the signatures were handed to the city councillor, who had them sent to the commissioner of Transport and Traffic by a messenger. Five weeks later I called the official in duty of the checking of the Residential Permit Parking petitions did not know about commissioner petition. He told me it would take about one year until the installation, because the checks of the Planning Department would take a long time, whereas the Traffic Planner in the Planning Department told me later that it takes them no longer than one month.

4.3.2 The Redevelopment of the Former Telephone Building

In the western part of the neighborhood that is claimed by both, Charles Village and Abell, associations, a former telephone building has been vacant for several years. It is a four story building that fills almost the whole lot. So there is no possibility to get parking spaces. A developer plans to renovate it and transform it into a building with 20 apartments. A variance of the zoning ordinance was required because of the lack of compulsory parking space. After a first rejection, the developer bought a row of garages off the alley, one block away in the Abell neighborhood as his parking facility. The Abell Improvement Association feared an aggravation of the parking problem and argued as follows:

- There are no additional parking spaces for the additional apartments. The project will only put the actual garage tenants’ cars onto the streets.

- The parking facilities have to be adjacent to the building. Parking has to be off street or off an alley that is at least 15 feet wide. Both conditions are not fulfilled.
The lighting back in the alley is so poor that people would not dare to park their car there at night.

The sewer system is in a bad shape and does not tolerate a new development.

The city is generally interested in getting back properties onto the tax roll, and was declined to give a variance to the ordinance. The board of Charles Village Civic Association was in favor of the development out of fear that the vacant building could deteriorate and become a blight of the neighborhood. There are also some people working at the Planning Department and at the Mayor's staff, and a realtor in that board. They decided to send simply a favoring letter to the zoning board. The developer argued that he would get mostly elderly people into the apartments, not all of them car owners, that half of the garages are not occupied by cars, and that he would improve the alley lighting. Abell Association decided to fight against the development, and called for a big show up at the hearing before the Zoning Board.

4.3.3 The Hearing before the Zoning Board

To my astonishment, quite a few people from Charles Village Association and the city councilwoman, Mary Pat Clark, were present. The developer had mobilized them to testify. Abell Improvement Association was represented by over a dozen people.

The developer presented his project and described how he had tried to get the mandatory parking spaces. Building them into the basement would be much too expensive to get reasonable rents. Anyhow the rents would be quite high, such attracting only a certain class of tenants. In addition to the concessions already mentionned, he explained an agreement with two house owners giving the garage tenants the right to pass between the two houses and to get in a more direct way from the building to the garages.

Two Charles Village board members testified in favor as did the councilwoman. Maria Lombardi and an immediate neighbor of the development, a lawyer, testified with the arguments listed above, and the lawyer announced he would appeal a favorable decision of the Zoning Board. Other members of Abell testified also, expressing their fears of aggravated parking problems.

The board finally decided in favor of a variance to the zoning ordinance. The immediate neighbors, including the lawyer, wanted to appeal. so did the associations board and began to collect contributions, but after a final negotiation with the developer, they decided to withdraw the appeal. Additionally, the
developer had offered to give priority to elderly people from
the neighborhood for the first floor apartments, to put the
garages in a good shape and to include the garage rent in the
apartment rents to make sure that the garages would be used.

4.4 Remarks to this Case Study

Abell Improvement Association has a much larger reservoir of
skilled people than Carrollton Circle Civic Association.
Therefore you cannot find the dominance of a couple of people as
there, and it is possible to form independently working
committees. But it is interesting to watch the important role of
the secretary, who gives impulses, gathers people for committees
and tasks, and watches the progress of the projects. Having had
to go to work before finishing high school, she now manages to
find the trained people among neighbors and friends, and to use
their advice to write letters which argue in quite sophisticated
legal terms.

4.4.1 The Relations to the City

Both observed issues involve highly well defined and standardized
proceedings that try to formalize the relation between
neighborhoods and city. In the case of the residential permit
parking, the only contact points are the filing of the petition
by letter, and the public hearing just before the final
decision. All the rest in between is the duty alone of the
Department of Transit and Traffic and of the traffic planning
section of the Planning Department. In this special case, an
inquiring telephone call or two by the neighborhood association
in the beginning, and my and Maria Lombardi's calls made to get
informed over the working progress (which actually started the
departments actions), and the filing of the petition to the
councilwoman who had it sent to the commissioner, were
interventions not mentionned in the regulations.

So the Department of Transport and Traffic has no person
responsible mainly for the relations to the neighborhoods. The
technical people at the traffic lights for instance, do not like
peoples interventions. They are tired of the laymens ideas,
which in most cases imply technically impossible or unusual or
too expensive proposals. The answer given by the official in
charge of the residential permit parking, seems to be typical for
a certain style of bureaucracy, as issues coming from the outside
are deferred, until an intervention as our calls activates them.

I was astonished that the petition was filed by the
intermediary councilwoman. Maybe she offered this service as a
sign of kind intention being on the other side at the telephone building hearing the same day; maybe also that Maria Lombardi found it would be favorable to show the councilwoman’s backing of the residential permit parking, especially after they had had different opinions about the telephone building development. The councilwoman told me that she liked to know exactly when and how the petition had been sent to the commissioner, enabling her to have a strict eye upon the proceedings. The District Planner was not involved and never mentioned. She has been in her position only since late fall. I cannot imagine this to happen to Suzanne Williams in the sixth district.

5. Review of the Three Points of Discussion.

5.1 Communication to Officials Happens on a Low Level in Hierarchy.

The communication to highly professional officials at a relatively low level in the bureaucracy hierarchy, generally seems to be confirmed in the neighborhood planning field. Even reportedly good friends of the Mayor among leaders of service delivering communities usually do not circumvent the planners or threaten to do so. In wealthier neighborhoods, threats by individuals to interfere on a higher level seem to be more common. I could imagine that organizations that have several professional city officials sitting at the board, get some things done more smoothly.

Yet the recourse to the political level of the elected officials seems to be quite frequent. I cannot decide if this is rather a means to guarantee the process against redlining, or if the interest of the councilpeople to look useful to their constituency is more important.

Patronage, as reported of many other cities (interviews in Boston, mentions by other interview partners), seem to be of low importance in the present city administration. Jobs like the Mayor’s Representatives at the Multipurpose Centers might be an exception, but these more social service oriented institutions were beyond my study field.

The two planning agencies are well used to work with the neighborhoods and consider this cooperation as important and desirable, whereas in Transport and Traffic I felt that many officials do not like the interference of ignorant lay people with their highly professional traffic engineering.
5.2 The Community Organizations have been Satisfied Somehow.

Almost all persons who work as staff people in bureaucracy or in community organizations confirmed even a stronger statement, namely that the neighborhood organizations are coopted and bought out by the city's money, jobs and services. They knew about one person, Brandon Wash, and his organization, which stay militant and are willing to fight, instead of being silenced by money. I can certainly say the same about Remington Community Survival Center. But when I came in contact with it, it was too late to include it in this report. Maybe there are other rather covertly working organizations that are not listed in directories neither.

Another organization had stayed rather outspoken in many issues, COPO. COPO was not fighting the city during my stay here, but it fought against raises of B&G&E fees. In the past, they had fought for rent control, against the Harborsplace project, and against the Interstate links that would have cut their neighborhoods. By allocating service delivery to affiliated special organizations, the umbrella organization itself has apparently managed to keep more independence.

My observations would confirm these statements for the neighborhood and general community groups that are staffed and that get money from the city for delivering services (mainly housing and social services). Paying staff for these organizations had originally been done also with the intention to enable them, among others, to criticize the city (Robert Embry), but the thin skin of the Mayor, the staffs interest in keeping their job and maybe success, seem to have led to the present situation.

But I cannot confirm these strict statements for the smaller neighborhood organizations outside the real problem areas, like Abell. Though they use the city's programs which offer assistance in self help (e.g. neighborhood watch, alley cleaning), or legal procedures the neighborhood can apply for (e.g. residential permit parking, historic district), they seem to preserve enough independence to fight the city, if they really find their interests hurt. I would say that these neighborhoods, in general, are satisfied through access to programs and legal procedures.

The wealthy neighborhoods with almost no permanent major problems seem to solve most neighborhood problems on an individual base (personal connections, through lawyers), and they only organize in special cases. These neighborhoods need not to fight.

The second statement in its very general form seems to be quite
well confirmed, but it should be refined by distinguishing between different categories of organizations.

5.3 Baltimore is Best in Using Federal Funds.

The third statement has been generally recognized, at least compared to other cities. It is connected to the first point. The most controversial issues were the balance between development for downtown or for the neighborhoods, the big influence of the (not elected) trustees, and the relative neglect of the schools. I cannot really judge this statement, as I do not have enough insight and no experience with other cities.

6 Conclusions.

The whole study is on Baltimore only and the issues I had to concentrate on were mainly in the physical planning and housing fields. Due to time and resource restrictions, it was confined to some case studies and to a series of interviews with people who are or were active in this field. The study is also merely descriptive. So it is difficult to generalize the findings.

Nevertheless, I learned a lot about the situation in the older American cities, about the roles and functions of people and organizations in neighborhoods, and about interactions between neighborhood associations and the local government. This experience has made me more sensible to these issues for future work in this field. The work may also, in its more general part, prove useful in making the start of future studies on Baltimore's neighborhoods easier.
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