

Community
Council
of the
Atlanta Area inc.

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February 15, 1967

Mr. Boisfeuillet Jones, President
Emily and Ernest Woodruff Foundation
230 Peachtree Street, N. W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Bo:

You and I talked recently about the Community Council, where it has been, where it is going and what it needs. The Council needs your help now, not to fulfill original objectives (which it has done in some measure) but to fit a new role in the complex and growing society which is Atlanta today.

When established in 1960, the Council was given a grant of \$50,000 a year for five years by your Foundation. The Community Chest matched this sum. The goals were -

- to find solutions to the problems of poverty
- to coordinate public and private social agencies
- to eliminate unproductive agencies through merger
- to provide the Community Chest with a decision-making capacity for its fund allocation problems.

At its inception, the Council was looked upon as a potential social planning and coordinating force for an area that lacked any effective organization of its kind. I remember Council Board members making speeches at civic clubs, promising all things to all people even before it had a professional executive or had had a chance to truly measure the dimensions of the job. Some thought of social planning as a study of a single social agency. Others saw it as a detailed guide for allocating social welfare programs for a ten-year period.

Although effective in a number of areas, the Council spent a good part of the first five years searching for a grip on social planning and problems that kept shifting and growing. Since 1960, the Council has met a number of the founders' objectives. Others it can meet within the next five years. Still others may require different approaches from originally envisioned.

Let's look at the record.

On the score of the problems of poverty, the Council:

- Experimented with new ways of delivering services to the poor in West End, particularly those which would help break the cycle of dependency
- Took the lead in planning Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc.
- Supplied the social fact finding and planning aspects of Atlanta's Community Improvement Program, on the basis of which it now is helping Atlanta apply for funds under the new Model Cities demonstration program
- Has established an information and referral service to help people find agency assistance
- Planned the training program for EOA aides and is now operating a training program for volunteers willing to serve in low-income areas
- Was materially involved in other efforts such as a work evaluation center, job development for and placement of older workers, a community school program, development of low-cost housing, lending to businesses in poverty areas and many others.

In the area of coordinating public and private social agencies, the Council's efforts have been effective in some cases but failures in others. The Permanent Conference has been a primary vehicle for the Council in the fields of health, recreation and welfare. Some of the achievements have been -

- Establishment of a \$225,000 Hospital and Health Planning unit as a regular Council activity
- Spade work for a comprehensive mental health program for Atlanta
- Assistance to the Mayor's Commission in its organization to combat Crime and Juvenile Delinquency
- Assistance in setting up Emory's Committee on Chronic Alcoholism

On elimination of unproductive agencies through merger, the Council's score is low for reasons outlined later in this letter. It was involved in the merger of agencies serving the blind and did devise a way to coordinate services for the elderly (Senior Citizen Services of Metropolitan Atlanta). Also, the Council's broad role has resulted in a number of agencies asking for consultation about their fields to avoid or to recognize duplications. A number of proposed agencies were investigated by the Council, some of which never got organized when the promoters saw they would be involving themselves in fields which were adequately covered.

On the score of providing the Community Chest with decision-making capacity for fund allocation problems, the Council has not yet done the job. A major difficulty here has been that some persons tend to oversimplify the task, expecting the Council can do a conscientious, good job with a staff that is woefully inadequate in number and background information. The community as a whole needs more information on the basis of which to make better decisions than it has in the social field.

A start was made with the Council's "Background for Decision Making," a delineation of major social welfare programs in Atlanta used by the Community Chest Budget Committee. The Chest also has had in hand for some time a Council proposal for an in-depth study of recreation in Atlanta as the first of a comprehensive series of studies in the social welfare and recreation areas. Still, this is the area where the Council can be faulted most by Council founders and particularly Chest members who desperately want decision-making

help. With perspective gained from six years with the Council, I feel the Council can and must help the community make better decisions but only under different conditions from those in which the Council has been operating.

Today, the Council's role is a changed one. It should be looked to for some of the same things envisioned by the founders. Others should be sought elsewhere. Still others which can emanate from the Council may have been only dimly envisioned seven years ago. This change in role is the product of changes in Atlanta, in society and in the experience of those of us who have grappled with the Council's mission since the beginning.

As background for understanding the Council's new role, let me cite some opinions.

The Federal Government today is pouring money into the social welfare field. Though checked some recently by Congress, this trend can be expected to continue. To justify this shower of money, Federal agencies must insist on plans against which results may be evaluated. In most communities, there are no effective local planning units, encouraging Federal agencies to do their own planning rather than relying on local groups. Even if there were effective local planning units, each agency must do some of its own planning or be derelict.

If Atlanta's own citizens are to have a real voice in how this Federal money is to be spent in their own community, they need effective mediums for expression. Our elected representatives are one medium. The Council can be another—one through which Atlanta leaders can discover the social facts about their community and have a say as to the type of programs they will or will not support. In some sense, the Council has played this role but not to the degree that it can or should.

The Council, then, must first be a source of information. Its Social Research Center is the key to any other effectiveness the Council may have. It must build up a bank of timely and reliable information, as well as techniques for getting other information quickly when needed. This sort of community resource is vital to federal, state and local governments, to public and private agencies, to foundations and to an informed public. Part of the job here is not only gathering the information but disseminating it in useful form, a job which the Council has not done adequately up to this time.

Second, the Council must be the vehicle through which Atlanta citizens can begin to do their own community planning. A major and difficult task ahead is what some describe as developing a conspectus of Atlanta's social welfare needs, an overview or a sketch similar to that produced by physical planning groups. Without it, the city may continue to ameliorate symptoms, mistaking them for causes of some of our most pressing needs. Thus the Council becomes not only the planner's planner but a planning organization in its own right. It can and must abate a common misconception that planning a program for an individual agency is comprehensive social planning.

Third, the Council must take the initiative in seeing that plans are discussed and implemented. Since it is not a funding body, it must be able to speak with a voice that is respected by those who dispense funds to public and private agencies serving our community. It must use the technique of exposing agencies and others to the facts of a problem, such as it now does through the Permanent Conference and as it intends to do with businessmen on the subject of unemployment.

And finally, it must be a consultive, evaluation and program development source for agencies and others. It is this last service which many in the community seem to want most from the Council and which, under its present organization and funding, it is least capable of doing without diverting staff from the first three. And without the first three jobs under control, the Council is not capable of doing the kind of work which the community should demand of it.

Today, the Council is underfunded to do its basic jobs—fact-finding, fact dissemination and planning. We have estimated they would require about \$200,000 a year invested in a core staff primarily devoted to those purposes. Having a core staff, the Council then would be in position to take on the job of consulting, evaluation and program development for fees which would pay for the added staff required and attendant overhead. The staff, under this arrangement, would be large enough to give the Council flexibility. It now does not have this maneuverability when it must divert someone from a basic job to do a special job which may or may not be consistent with the core job. We have had to do more and more of these special jobs because they have given the Council a means of contracting for work which in turn has meant income needed just to keep the core staff together. This vicious circle in the long run will lead to the destruction of the Council as an effective agency.

Mr. Boisfeuillet Jones
February 15, 1967

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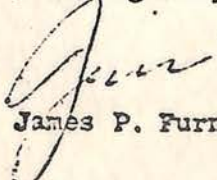
Right now, the Council needs relief from chasing special assignments that produce income. It needs to have at least two years—preferably three—during which it can

- Get the core job well underway without diverting personnel to other work
- Broaden financial support from Chest and local government sources for its core work
- Add staff and capacity to take on the special jobs which so many agencies and persons want the Council to do now, but only add people as the level of funded work would justify
- Build a much stronger base of understanding and support through the involvement of a more varied and interested Board of Directors. These directors when agreeing to serve must agree to take on active assignments as well as set policy
- Involve younger persons from all parts of the community in Council work, thereby serving as a source of future Council directors.

So, we need the help of you and your Foundation now. We need your advice, assistance, influence and we need money which I don't see coming from any other source in the community with the speed or in the quantity needed if the Council is going to go forward from its present plateau.

Because of my involvement in Jamaica, I'm asking Duane to get with you at the earliest opportunity to settle on what you think should be our next step in working out those things which the Council needs so very much now.

Best regards,


James P. Furniss

P. S. Am sending a copy of this to Billy Sterne who has agreed to help on the nominations to the Council Board this year.