

BUILDING SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT, INC.

Memorandum

Date: November 17, 1966

TO: Paul N. Ylvisaker

Project/No.:

FROM: Ezra Ehrenkrantz

Subject: Area of emphasis for White House
Task Force on the City

In trying to write a letter in response to your request at the first task force meeting, I have become impressed by the extent to which the majority of the problems that we talk about today have been reviewed over and over again in the past. On most of these I am relatively inexperienced, and rather than trying to set out a grand framework on all of the problems that we should try to deal with, I would like to concentrate on one particular area which I feel very strongly about.

The Federal Government sponsors a great deal of research in city problems, some of it academic, and the bulk of it practical. Neither benefits substantially from the other. Theoretical study of the city concentrates variously on urban growth and form, social ecology, or the planning process, making little contribution to the understanding of action policies. Projects are developed on an ad hoc basis to meet a compromise among the expressed needs of their more vocal constituents; the outcome is frequently wide of the first objective and there is seldom any attempt to show how it got there. There are no controlled experiments in the field and little cumulation of evidence.

Performance in both the academic and practical areas of urban studies could be improved by providing a bridge between the two kinds of work. I suggest that a portion--possibly 2%-5%--of every Federal program directly or remotely affecting the city be committed for experimental work, and that these experiments be conducted under the direction of an interlocking body which would represent and serve all the affected Federal agencies, State and local officials where appropriate and representatives of industry, labor and the academic community. In addition to performing (1) research and (2) experimental projects, this body could:

- (3) provide policy coordination between agencies,
- (4) serve as a clearing house for information on regular and experimental programs of the linking agencies, and for consulting services in research and planning,
- (5) direct contract research for other public and non-profit bodies.

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These experimental programs would review the effect of possible changes in codes, labor practices, market organization and many other aspects of our work in cities which affect cost and performance of our physical structures. We would equally be concerned with the relation of people to one another, the introduction of social services, and the development of neighborhoods. By structuring the experimental programs, it should be possible to develop a data base which would enable future decisions to be made on major programs for the city on better information than we have today.

Given such a means of coordination, Federally sponsored urban studies could be structured in a planned, cumulative sequence, contribute reliable experimental evidence, and provide a sound bridge between academic and practical study in the field.

I hope that I am not stressing a point of view on a single subject too strongly for the first go-round.

Ezra Ehrenkrantz