

DECENTRALIZING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN THE PLANNING PROCESS;

A STUDY OF THE
COMMUNITY BOARDS ON STATEN ISLAND

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said in the last ten years regarding the inadequacy of existing mechanisms in New York City for channeling and resolving citizens' complaints about public programs. The major focus of citizen discontent has been the need for better delivery of city services and, correspondingly, a desire for more citizen influence over the governing process. The citizen's problem in securing services is complicated by two factors: (1) the large and cumbersome hierarchy of city departments directly affecting the delivery of local services; and (2) the lack of coordinated service delivery districts resulting in fragmented and ineffective government. There are, for example, individual districts for sanitation, health, and community planning, as well as separate Model City neighborhoods, police precincts, and OEO-designated poverty areas. There is also a lack of local centers to coordinate these efforts and to permit accessibility by the citizen to the point of service delivery.

Opposition to the centralized, one-tier structure of New York City government is not a sudden phenomenon. It has been surfacing

in a variety of civic groups and community organizations all over the city, sometimes quietly, and sometimes, as in the school board controversy, with noisy repercussions. Since the Charter revision of 1963, several plans have been proposed for restructuring the government, and all of them have advocated, to some extent, a decentralization of the city's power structure.¹ Some of these have advocated administrative decentralization; others have pressed for political decentralization. The primary objective has been, however, the same--a desire to create more responsive government and to more directly involve the citizen in the decision-making process.

This inclusion of the citizen in the decision-making process is felt to be a natural progression in the quest for better, more responsive government.² It is viewed as a way to deal with the frustrations, irritations, and alienation of citizens by enabling them to break into the many-layered government. Decentralizing city government, although not meant to be a cure-all for the many problems the city faces, is considered to be one method of providing the basis for more responsive government and for allowing the local citizen the opportunities for a stronger voice in matters concerning his daily life. It is also a method for re-creating the sense of smaller, identifiable communities within the highly complex,

heterogeneous, boroughs of New York City.

There have been a number of attempts within the city to facilitate increased local participation in policy decisions. Some of these, such as Community Action Programs and Model Cities, have had impetus from the federal government. Others were initiated by previous Mayors, such as Lindsay, who initiated the concepts of little city halls, Office of Neighborhood Government, and District Managers. Community School Boards were established in the late sixties, as a result of a study urging decentralization of the school board structure.

One of the most unique decentralized agency structures involving citizen participants is that of the community boards which correspond to each of sixty-two planning districts established formally in 1968 and authorized in principle in the 1963 Charter. The intent of the Charter was to create vehicles by which people in each community might have a direct share in public decisions affecting the welfare of their area. Each board includes up to fifty people who are appointed by the Borough President and who serve without compensation for two-year overlapping terms. Members must be either residents of the community district or have a significant interest in it. Originally conceived of as strictly advisory bodies to the Borough President, the boards' role was expanded

through a local law in 1969 to include relations with other agencies, provisions for a budget and staff, the right to hold public hearings, and review of most matters affecting the welfare of their districts.

What makes the boards unique is their ability to bridge the gap between the non-structured and non-professional nature of many citizen advisory groups and the more structured and professional composition of city agencies and bureaucracies. The inclusion of many highly educated, articulate, professionals on the boards with a knowledge of how to work within government places the boards in a particularly good bargaining position within borough and city government. In an effort to respond to the number of complaints on service delivery within their individual districts, the boards are now moving in this direction and are attempting, somewhat unsuccessfully, to deal directly with agencies in solving service delivery problems for their neighborhoods.

In spite of the varying attempts at decentralizing city services, the vast majority of New Yorkers have not been exposed to any possible benefits from decentralization. In a poll a few years ago, New Yorkers were questioned about the job the City government was doing, the form of government, the desirability of decentralization, and the implementation of decentralization.³ Their responses revealed a high degree of dissatisfaction with the method of handling

problems in New York City.

Citizens' complaints about present service delivery and their interest in decentralization of city government have formed part of the basis for authorization by the New York Legislature of structural reform of New York City's Charter. A bill was passed in May, 1972, creating the State Charter Revision Commission for New York City, giving the Commission the specific objective of planning a structural reform of City government designed: (1) to encourage genuine citizen participation in local city government; (2) to ensure that local city government is responsive to the needs of its citizens; and (3) to achieve effective local government.⁴

As part of its research objectives, the Commission will be examining the community boards, their role, structure, member selection, optimum board size, and citizen participation, and will then relate the findings to the thirty or so other studies on New York City government that are in preparation.

As a complement to the work of the Charter Revision Commission, this study will focus on the community boards in terms of their role as resident advisors in the planning process, their role in coalescing community sentiment in the formulation of planning priorities, and their facility in expediting the flow of information between governmental agencies and the communities they represent.

The further development of the boards will be studied, particularly in relation to such matters as accountability, functions, structure, and relations with other agencies. Consideration will be given to the effectiveness of the community boards in serving as a vehicle for citizen participation within the decentralized structure of the City Planning Commission and as part of the planning process.

The study of the community boards will be both descriptive and analytical. The purpose of the descriptive material will be to examine the various sections of Local Law 39 which expanded the role of the boards and to discuss its implementation on various boards city wide, including: (1) discussion of the move towards decentralization in New York City out of which Local Law 39 developed; (2) clarification of the meaning, goals, types, and philosophies of participation; and (3) documentation of the development and structure of the four community boards on Staten Island.

The purpose of the analysis will be to discuss the functions the Staten Island boards in particular are fulfilling in city government and in their communities, with emphasis on the following: (1) the limitations of these functions on the boards' ability to meaningfully participate in decision-making; (2) the type of participation that takes place on the boards, and its acceptability to the participants; and (3) the strategies of those who interact with the boards.

Access to much background material from the Charter Revision Commission, as well as early drafts of the Commission's report on the boards, was invaluable.

There has been a sincere effort throughout the study to maintain as objective an orientation as possible, and to refrain from what might easily have become "cooptation" by particular points of view.

Organization of the Study

This chapter has attempted to present a perspective from which to view the recent trends towards decentralization and the interest by citizens in participating in government. Chapter II will provide an historical overview of government and community organization in New York City. The conceptual framework will include a discussion of the forms that decentralization and citizen participation have taken in New York, as well as the goals and political philosophies that support various forms of participation.

Chapter III will discuss the historical background of the boards in New York City, their development over time, and the gradual strengthening of their role within the boroughs and their respective communities. The specific composition, operating procedures, and functions of the boards will be examined in detail in Chapter IV.

Chapter V will review the historical development of the boards

as a reflection of their concept of participation, and the ramifications of these strategies for the boards.

Methodology

With the exception of the Charter Revision Commission's recent reports on the boards which will be released sometime this spring, previous studies on local government have focused more on the theory and structure of community boards than on the actual experience of the boards. For this reason, it was necessary to place a great deal of reliance on field work and to use the participant-observer approach. The Borough President was kind enough to permit the author to attend all regular board meetings, sub-committee and leadership meetings. Demographic data was acquired from board member records and was supplemented by data from a survey conducted by the Charter Revision Commission. This has been used in evaluating the present composition of the four Staten Island boards as far as type of membership and representation are concerned.

A number of formal and informal interviews took place with government officials, board officers and members, residents, members of civic organizations and the Department of City Planning, the Office of Staten Island Development, board coordinators, the Office of Neighborhood Government, and the Consultant to the Community

on Staten Island, as well as some comparison of the four boards, their leadership, committee structure, and community involvement. These will be further developed in Chapter VI in terms of the various strategies used by agencies, groups, and individuals in dealing with the boards; the growing independence of the boards as they test the limit of their "rights" under Local Law 39; the increasing opportunities for conflict with the Borough President because of this independence; the ability of the boards to achieve the objectives of Local Law 39; and an evaluation of the boards' ability to provide a worthwhile function for the citizenry. Chapter VII is devoted to a summary and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS DECENTRALIZATION AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The fact that people seek responsive government is not a surprising one, nor is it a particularly recent phenomenon. People have always wanted to feel that someone was willing to listen to their complaints, and that there was someone to whom they could turn for their problems. The system of government in New York City has become less able to be responsive to its residents because of the sheer size of the city and the increasing centralization of authority in order to combat the excesses and abuses of power that have pervaded its government for over one hundred fifty years. A review of this historical development will help put in perspective the recent interest in the creation of more responsive government through the mechanisms of decentralization and citizen participation.

Government in New York City

The history of government in New York City is dominated by the influence of Tammany Hall, the popular name of the executive committee of the Democratic Party of New York County, and its

encounters with various reform groups that have tried to wrest control from it. Riordin, in his book, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, discusses the early history of the party and its rise against the leaders of the aristocratic and propertied elements of New York City, which sought to limit suffrage to freeholders.¹ In founding the Society of St. Tammany in 1789, William Mooney, an upholsterer in New York City, sought to create a national society that would be democratic in principle and action. The society's officers, known as sachems, controlled the political mechanism of the Democratic Party.

Charges of widespread corruption in the society occurred as early as 1806-07, but even the removal of a number of Tammany Hall city officials failed to affect the society's power. The election of its grand sachem, Martin Van Buren, to the presidency of the United States in 1836 further supported its prestige.

The Hall's power base now lay in the vast number of immigrant families who had inundated the city in the middle of the century and desperately needed help with jobs, housing, and money. The members of Tammany Hall responded to their need by catering to the people's personal interests and problems and by granting such special privileges as dispensations from the courts. In return, the members expected votes and money at campaign time.

Under Fernando Wood, who had several times been mayor of

New York, the immigrant groups of the city were organized to gain control of Tammany Hall. Complete boss rule of the Hall occurred in 1868 when William M. Tweed took control of the society, and under him corruption reached a climax.

The source of Tammany's success was its control of the Police Department and the courts.² In addition, the spoils system operated freely and positions were political plums. Elective or appointive office was a sought-after prize, since office was synonymous with power and prestige. The politicians themselves profited in four main ways: embezzlements and other fraud on the public treasury, the selling of privileges, extortion, and "honest graft."³ Even at its best, the Tammany government was "marked by waste, inefficiency, shabbiness, mediocrity and a spirit of standpattism rather than of progress."⁴

A tradition of opposition to machine politics and machine government began to emerge simultaneously with the Tammany machine. Characterized by ideals of morality, ethics, and democracy, it was supported by more well-to-do and well-educated people who were "less obsessed with the struggle for material success than the professional politicians."⁵ It emerged in a variety of civic organizations dating from the middle 1800's that called for ballot reform, a merit system, and municipal reform. The principal type of political

reform following the Civil War was the Fusion movement, and its members sought to take over control of city government from Tammany Hall. In spite of occasional successes, they were never able to continue in office beyond one term until well into the twentieth century.

The height of the reform movement came in the 1890's during the great Tammany scandals. Corruption led to an increased interest in municipal affairs and resulted in the formation of new reform groups, some of which lasted only briefly, others which have survived to today.⁶

It was during this period that a new Charter was written for the City of New York which provided for the consolidation of several cities and towns into a single city with five boroughs--the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Richmond (Staten Island). The new Charter called for a strongly centralized City government headed by the Mayor, and a five-member Board of Estimate and Apportionment controlled by the Mayor. The Board was charged with drawing up the City budget, and its approval was required for all financial transactions.⁷

By the twenties, the reform element was well developed and seemed to split into two different types of groups. One aimed towards the promotion of good government in general, while the other

was concerned with particular areas of government.⁸ One was oriented towards "ferreting out corrupt and incompetent officeholders and bringing about the election of good and competent men," while the other focused on the need to reorganize city government to minimize the strength of the political machine.⁹

The need for legislative investigation in the early thirties again gave reform a powerful push. In his book, The LaGuardia Years, Charles Garrett discusses LaGuardia's significant challenge to the Tammany machine in 1933 when he became Mayor on the Fusion ticket of the reformers.¹⁰ LaGuardia proceeded to revamp procedures in the merit system and cleaned up graft, corruption and other discreditable practices that had flourished under Tammany. Government became more efficient, effective, responsive, professional and economical.

When pressure came once again for Charter reform, LaGuardia established a charter commission in 1935. Although not significantly different from either the Charter Revision of 1898 or a later one in 1901, it was felt to be some improvement. It established a City Council which replaced the Board of Aldermen, and adopted proportional representation for its election. A significant step was to establish a City Planning Commission to develop a Master Plan for the City's development and to initiate zoning changes. It was also

hoped that "an independent, nonpolitical City Planning Commission would help eliminate extravagance and waste in the expenditure of capital funds while providing sounder municipal planning."

Both the Mayor and the Board of Estimate emerged with augmented powers from this Charter Revision, to the detriment of both the City Council and the Borough Presidents. The Revision Commission, when faced with pressure to either abolish the office of Borough President or to retain it with increased powers, took a middle course and preserved the powers of the Borough President with regard to such things as construction and maintenance of borough streets, bridges, tunnels, and sewers, but transferred powers dealing with public and private buildings--matters of a more general nature--to city government. The Borough Presidents for the most part opposed this part of the Charter Revision.

Opposition to the Revision also came from the Democratic organizations, principally because the various changes resulted in a great decrease in political jobs. In spite of the opposition, however, the Charter Revision was passed.

New York in the forties had changed, and so had the traditional patterns of voting in the city. The Depression had made people conscious of politics and government who had paid little attention before; immigration was slowing down; the former system of

the political club as the source of "clubhouse relief" was being replaced by a broad public welfare program. The result was a gradual lessening of Tammany power. Organized labor, which was growing stronger and more politically conscious, backed LaGuardia because of his social program and his interest in protecting the interests of workers and strikers. LaGuardia's sweeping victory in 1937, in which the Fusion ticket received fifteen out of sixteen votes on the Board of Estimate, was the final blow to Tammany's control of that body.

The government continued to function, however, with a strong elective Mayor and the two policy bodies of the Board of Estimate and the City Council. The Board of Estimate, composed of the Mayor, Comptroller, and President of the Council, plus the five Borough Presidents, continued to pass on franchises, made zoning changes in the City Map, participated in budget adoptions, and so forth.¹¹ The City Council was "vested with the legislative power of the City."¹² The balance shifted somewhat with another Charter Revision, this time in 1963, which resulted in a further strengthening of the powers of the Mayor, and, to a lesser degree, the City Council.

Sayre and Kaufman note in their book, Governing New York City, that the Mayor was now placed "squarely in the capital budget process," since the budget was previously submitted by the City

Planning Commission and has since been prepared and submitted by the Mayor.¹³ He also has greater authority over the administration of the expense budget and has greater opportunities to "exercise his discretion in the day-to-day financial affairs of the city."¹⁴ All powers not specifically assigned to an existing City official or institution were transferred to the Mayor, as well as the authority held by the Borough Presidents over street and sewerage construction and maintenance.

Although the contracting and patronage opportunities thus afforded the Borough Presidents were not immense in comparison with the overall scale of city operations, they gave the Borough Presidents and the county organizations of the parties sufficient wherewithal to attract and hold their party followers together. The 1961 charter, however, transferred these duties to a newly established Department of Highways, to the Departments of Public Works, Sanitation, or Traffic. So the change had political as well as administrative repercussions.¹⁵

The most important power remaining to the Borough Presidents, therefore, is their membership on the Board of Estimate. It is here, Sayre and Kaufman believe, that the strength behind the Borough Presidents becomes obvious--that of the County Leader or group of Assembly District Leaders, and a borough constituency of uncertain but tangible dimensions:

The Borough Presidents bring to the Board neither the impressive formal powers of the Mayor or of the Comptroller, nor the ambiguous potential of the President of the Council; instead, each Borough President brings to the Board a consciousness that he represents a county party organization with which (unless he is

a fusion official) he ordinarily has close ties, and that he has the formal capacity to claim that he speaks, as no other member of the Board can, for the special interests of his borough.¹⁶

The Borough Presidents, however, and "borough politics" do not correspond to the "ward politics" of Chicago and Philadelphia.¹⁷ Borough Presidents and County Leaders respond to a wider array of forces than do aldermen and ward leaders; they are more visible and more vulnerable, and therefore more responsible. Because of this, the recent government of New York City is somewhat unusual in that it has escaped much of the parochialism and low visibility of a system of ward politics. The main characteristics of New York City government and politics, according to Sayre and Kaufman, may be described as a system of "open" politics, the absence of a single dominant ruling elite, a pattern of competition and bargaining which allows other groups within it, and a system "inherently conservative but not incapable of innovation."¹⁸

The Role of the City Planning Commission

These characteristics of New York City government have been maintained partly as a result of the City Planning Commission and its unique role within the system. The Commission, created by the 1938 Charter and sustained by the 1963 version, was given great power and political independence. Its membership includes a

chairman who is appointed by the Mayor and serves at his pleasure, and an additional six members who serve for eight-year overlapping terms. This method permits independence on the part of the Commissioners since their terms outlast the administration that appointed them.

The Commission members are paid and represent a varied and distinguished background. For example, in March, 1973, the members included an urban economist who was dean of a school of urban affairs and a former member of a community board; a trade unionist and former community board member; an architect; the former head of a community board; an attorney and specialist in government financing; and a community and civic leader.¹⁹ The chairman, John Zuccotti, has been actively involved in housing and urban affairs and was special assistant to the former under-secretary of the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In his testimony before the State Charter Revision Commission, John Zuccotti, Chairman of the Commission, noted: "The Commission is a unique institution charged with responsibility for putting elements together, for spotting trends, identifying priorities and linking ideas."²⁰ Its primary areas of responsibility are in physical planning, the preparation of the capital budget and comprehensive or long-range planning. The Commission functions in considering

problems of a local nature that need city-wide solutions, and by balancing legitimate community demands and metropolitan priorities.

The Commission is the place where linkages are forged and opportunities seized. The Planning Commission and the Department are necessary complements to the process. The Commission is the place where pertinent questions are asked and suppositions tested. The staff provides the expertise and analysis. The Commission reviews and provides the public definition. One wouldn't be useful without the other. The process works because the Commission exists.²¹

This planning process, however, proceeds from a purely theoretical base to the more realistic world of politics and government. Chapin defines city planning as "a means for systematically anticipating and achieving adjustment in the physical environment of a city consistent with social and economic trends and sound principles of civic design."²² It is a continuing process involving deriving, organizing, and presenting a comprehensive program of both a short-range and a long-range perspective for community development and renewal, and is designed "to fulfill local objectives of social, economic, and physical well-being."²³

Although the chairman of the Commission would like to think that because of the Charter provisions the Commission is shielded from political and parochial pressures, the Commission becomes inevitably caught up in the city's political process.

Because the Commission thus confronts its rivalries with other agencies as an institution lacking the powerful protection

of either the Mayor or the Board of Estimate, and without a strong supporting constituency, its vulnerability is great.²⁴

It is pressured by real estate interests. The building and construction industries, the transportation and utility groups, and others press for both minimum change "in the settled patterns of bargaining and mutual concessions," and for a public policy which leaves planning "to the decisions of the market and to the ingenuity of its participants."²⁵ The Board of Estimate, in moving to reduce the threat of the Commission's role, has used a policy of containment to halt Commission plans and to manipulate these proposals in terms of the Board's own institutional objectives. Such moves have helped reduce the concept of the Commission as an autonomous "fourth power" in the government of the city and have modified the concept of the Commission as an institution of experts with an authoritative voice in the decisions of city government.²⁶

TOWARDS MORE RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Community Organization in New York City

With the decline in the power of Tammany Hall and machine politics, citizens were left with little opportunity for airing their grievances, for referring their aspirations to government, and for interacting directly with those who could make an impact on the decision-making process. The current moves for decentralization

are rooted in the desire of citizens, through a proliferation of civic groups and community organizations, to make both direct and indirect inputs into decision making.

Most studies of interest groups in New York City have come to the conclusion that the variety of groups functioning within the city's political system have both a direct and an indirect input into decision making.

Because of specialization, functional city-wide organizations are the most active participants. There are a large number of groups operating in the city which are organized on a city-wide basis to deal with functional issues, other groups are organized along ethnic lines and still others for broader purposes relating to general city policies . . . vertical (city-wide) structures would tend to be more influential vis a vis policy than local groups.²⁷

Both decentralization and citizen participation are seen as strategies to bring about responsiveness and increased effectiveness in city government. Care must be taken, however, to refrain from confusing decentralization with citizen participation, or to assume that the former guarantees the latter, or that decentralization automatically results in citizen involvement. To the contrary, decentralization can take place without any significant amount of citizen input, just as citizens can participate in various ways in a highly centralized structure. However, the current one-tier structure of New York City government in a city of 8,000,000 people makes

participation of a policy-influencing nature extremely difficult. It is for this reason that increased citizen participation as a "process by which policy decisions regarding service levels, quality, and delivery are shared among professional bureaucrats, citizens and elected officials"²⁸ is so closely linked with the alternatives for decentralization under consideration by the State Charter Revision Commission.

Forms of Decentralization

Two definitions of decentralization are relevant to this study. The first is that decentralization is an attempt to reduce the scale on which public services are operated. This is directly responsive to the stated goals of the Charter Revision Commission which are to ensure that local government is responsive to the needs of its citizens as well as its being effective local government. Simply stated, reducing the scale on which governmental services are operated will allow for more contact between the governmental sub-unit and the people it serves and will make this body more accountable to the community.

A second definition of decentralization is that it is an attempt to redistribute effective political power more widely among people and groups. Unlike the first definition, which stresses

decentralization of services, this one refers to control over services. Whereas decentralization which focuses on delivery of services does not require citizen involvement, decentralization which implies control mandates participation of a policy-making or decision-making nature. It is when government fails to responsibly deliver services that citizens press for participation and for control over the allocation of resources.

Governments are, however, reluctant to transfer control over service delivery and the allocation of resources to citizen participants and therefore look for alternatives which will link citizens more closely to local governmental bodies without transferring power to either. One method is to consider some form of administrative decentralization. Another is to involve citizens in some type of structure where they can be heard or where they can participate with limited advisory powers. Both methods have been attempted in New York.

In the first method, administrative decentralization, certain decision-making authority, discretionary power, and program responsibility in particular public service areas is devolved to neighborhood areas. One method designed to increase the proximity and accountability of local government to the community is the neighborhood council or board, which reviews program plans,

decides on multi-service center locations, and so forth. In a recent survey, the Advisory Commission learned from those responding that 16 percent of the neighborhood councils identified in the survey participated in budgetary reviews, and 18 percent had been authorized to hire a professional staff.²⁹ Members can be elected, but are also appointed by either neighborhood organizations or the chief executive officer.

The appointment of neighborhood or district managers is another method of administrative decentralization. New York City is currently experimenting with this form through the establishment of experimental Community Planning Districts as a method of making structural changes in the way services are delivered by city bureaucracies to various districts.

In December, 1971, John Lindsay issued his "Program for Command Decentralization and Integration of City Services at the Community Level," which advocated two changes in the administrative process in order to make urban government more responsive to the people: (1) that greater power must be put in the hands of administrative officials in the field, and (2) that the local operations of a multitude of independent and unrelated City departments must be better coordinated so that they have coherence, focus and relevance to the needs of specific localities.³⁰ These local officers are

responsible for all the operations in the area of both a city-wide and local nature. The District Manager Experiment has been designed for officials to continue working within the administration, but with broader discretionary power to deal with the specific needs of the community.

The program was actually initiated through a functioning Office of Neighborhood Government program, and District Service Cabinets were set up with staff and supplies, and with key local agency officials. In order to develop an integrated approach to service delivery in their communities, the District Cabinets were given expanded authority to use their resources in meeting local needs and to work with other agencies in coordinating services.

A third form of administrative decentralization includes little city halls or multi-service centers, which would serve as branch offices for the chief executive and provide services similar to those at the main city hall. They administer certain decentralized services such as health and welfare, police, recreation, employment and code inspection.

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Affairs discusses another type of decentralization under consideration by the State Charter Revision Commission, political decentralization, which calls for the redistribution of political power and policy-making

authority through the creation of new, autonomous sub-unit governments having control over delivery of certain services.³¹ These sub-units pursue independent policies on fiscal, programmatic, and personnel matters, and are accountable to neighborhood constituencies and secondarily to the central political unit. The neighborhood or community development corporation is one form suggested as a first step toward neighborhood government (already used in Community Action Agencies and Model Cities). It is estimated that more than one thousand of these already exist in this country with responsibility for such areas as low-income housing construction, planning, rehabilitation projects, day care nurseries, legal services and health centers.³²

Forms of Participation

A second alternative to giving citizens significant control over service delivery and the allocation of resources is to allow participation in a controlled advisory capacity. Within this form, however, are considerable variations depending on the political philosophies of how and why people participate, and the goal orientation of those setting up the participatory structures. A number of participation patterns have been suggested by various writers, all using different terminology for what seem to be somewhat the same approaches to

structuring a model for participation.

One of the most well-known attempts is Sherry Arnstein's "ladder of participation," in which the extent of citizens' power in determining an end product is arranged in ascending form from programs that are defined as non-participatory, to those of tokenism, to those which involve real participation.³³ Most programs, she feels, are at the non-participation level. These bottom rungs represent participation that she calls (1) manipulation or (2) therapy, and which are oriented towards enabling powerholders to educate or "cure" the participants. The next rungs represent degrees of tokenism and include the strategies of (3) informing, (4) consultation, and (5) placation. These strategies place the citizen in a position to be heard, but the process is basically a one-way orientation and primarily a "window-dressing ritual." Placation itself involves the placement of "worthy" individuals on boards, where the success of their endeavors is dependent on the quality of technical assistance in articulating their priorities and the extent to which the community has been organized to press for these priorities. Rungs (6), (7), and (8) represent various stages of real participation. In Rung (6), partnership, power is redistributed through negotiations between citizens and power-holders acting on joint policy boards and planning committees. This method works best

when the citizens are accountable to an organized power base in the community. Board members can initiate plans, engage in joint planning, and review plans of city agencies. At the top of the ladder are (7) delegated power and (8) citizen control. In both of these, accountability of programs is definitely oriented towards citizens. In Rung (8), citizen control, participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate conditions under which outsiders may change them. The most well-known example of Rung (7), delegated power, is the community school board situation in New York City, in which elected citizen representatives had power over personnel, budget, and curriculum. This is unusual, however. Most programs fall into the non-participatory or tokenism category and constitute rubberstamp advisory committee structures. Arnstein notes in her article that in most cases where power has come to be shared, it was taken by the citizens, not given by the city.

The multitude of advisory boards in New York City cover the gamut from federally-sponsored neighborhood councils or neighborhood advisory groups in the Community Action Agencies, to advisory boards serving the metropolitan area, such as Comprehensive Health Planning Agency and the Council Against Poverty. Other boards are locally oriented, such as the community boards and

police precinct councils. The tendency for boards or councils to be composed of representatives of the community or of significant interests within the community reflects an elitist theory of participation rather than that of participatory-classical democracy.

Participatory-classical theorists, for example, believe that people learn to participate by participating--that participation enhances political equality and protects citizens' rights. Alexis de Tocqueville's classical book, Democracy in America, postulated the concept that citizens learn to know laws by participating in the act of legislation--that one takes a lesson in the forms of government from governing.³⁴ This supports the belief that power of the people depends on the importance of decisions they make, not on the number.

The elitist theory, by contrast, stresses representative democracy, and makes the presumption that the average citizen has little knowledge of public affairs and even less interest.³⁵ Elitist theorists argue that a successful and stable democratic system depends upon widespread apathy and general political incompetence.³⁶ Both Dahl and Truman have concluded that a "consensus of elites" are needed to defend the fundamental procedures of democracy in order to protect their own positions and the basic structure of society.³⁷ Dahl argues that the political system, operating through tradition and inertia, remains stable "because only a few 'key'

issues are the objects of controversy at any one time."³⁸ There is a tendency to assume that apathy is a sign of satisfaction; there is also the feeling that social movements are a threat to democracy and represent political extremism.

Whether one advocates the elitist theory of democracy or participatory democracy will make a significant difference in his or her attitudes toward participation, depending on where they sit in the overall administrative structure. The political philosophy will also have a bearing on the goals of participation which in turn will govern the form or pattern participation may take. Participation patterns, however, are reflective of other than goal orientation and political philosophy. Participation patterns in New York City relate very directly to class status and individual perceptions of ability to influence the decision-making process.

One of the assumptions in community organization is that the inclusion of large numbers of groups on boards and councils implies broad representation and a balancing of diverse interests within a community. Gittell notes, however, that a review of community organizations in New York City reveals a contradictory pattern, and notes that "city-wide, group membership and leadership tend to be middle class to upper middle class with extensive overlapping of membership."³⁹

In an analysis of the eight experimental districts chosen for the Office of Neighborhood Government experiment, Cittel discusses the differences in community organization within the lower class, middle class, and transition communities.⁴⁰ Although, historically, lower class groups have been involved with political structures, poor people are not actively associated with traditional governmental structure, particularly city-wide agencies. Groups are short lived, and the lack of involvement remains a major problem for those seeking to improve lower-class participation in solving service delivery problems for their community.

Middle-income groups represent a much more active, organized element and people tend to be involved in several community organizations. They tend to be more knowledgeable about the formal institutions of government, and are aware of the correct political channels for voicing demands. They are aware of community boards and school boards, and the community boards in particular highly represent this group of people. Cittel notes that a recent study confirms that the board members, selectively screened for membership by the Borough President, include a very high percentage of college graduates and more than 50 percent professionals and local businessmen.

In spite of the variation in patterns of participation, political

philosophies, and goals of participation, the same threads run throughout the various structures used to describe how people participate--the amount of input by citizens in the decision-making process, and the strategies of those who either solicit this input or are forced to accept it. In any discussion of participation, it is necessary to ask who is participating, and how and why they are participating. It is important to remember that where people are involved in the decision-making process as citizens in either an official or unofficial capacity, there are always those who will be affected by their input, and they become participants also. To define participation by individuals, groups, or organizations at any one time requires a recognition of the philosophy and goals of the participant as they relate to the pattern of participation.

Conclusions

City government in New York today is accused of being so remote from the people it serves that it fails to answer their needs. As corrupt as the politics of Tammany Hall were, the Hall was able to create for New Yorkers a sense of community, of personal effectiveness, and of the ability to influence the system. With the rise of the reform movement and the introduction of professionalism, efficiency, economy, nonpartisanship, and at-large elections into the

political system, a bureaucratic structure appeared which has seemed to many people to stand between them and responsive government.

The proliferation of civic groups and community organizations in the fifties and sixties were symptomatic of the problems associated with New York City's centralized governmental structure. Modern-day reformers began to press for the rejection of the tenets of the municipal reform movement of the first half of the twentieth century and called instead for the devolution of power, citizen control, responsiveness, effectiveness, and neighborhood-based political responsibility.

What was being created were local demand organizations which gave no serious attention to the responsive supply capacity of government. There was little consideration given to the realities of the municipal organization or its structure, to the opportunities and constraints on change or to change based on knowledge. Confrontation tactics, community control, non-negotiable demands, maximum feasible participation, participatory democracy--these were the slogans which were, themselves, a mirror of structural deficiency within city government but were often perceived as the strategy for change.⁴¹

This was the time, too, when such groups as the Citizens Union of New York City began to postulate solutions to what they perceived to be the forces that were destroying local communities. In recommending the formation of community planning districts and community planning boards for these districts, these groups were

offering an alternative to the position formerly occupied by local political parties. By creating a mechanism that would become a bridge between municipal operating agencies and the people, it was hoped that citizens could be brought in a meaningful way into the planning process.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY BOARDS IN NEW YORK

Local Community Boards in New York City are rooted in a concept of decentralization of municipal functions which has been under increasing public discussion since 1947, when the Citizens Union issued its program for community planning, "Home Town in the Great City."¹ Although twenty-six local Improvement Boards had been mandated as early as the first Charter of New York (1897, revised 1902), little attention was paid to these neighborhood entities until the publication of the Citizens Union paper.

In 1946, the Citizens Union contacted organizations, executive and city committees, and City Planning about its idea for regaining the "home town" sense that New Yorkers used to have. In seeking to get New York's civic leaders--official and voluntary--to begin to recognize communities, the Citizens Union proposed sketch maps for each borough (with the exception of Staten Island) of possible community planning districts. It suggested that any planning involving local action be undertaken on the basis of nuclear districts with a possible civic center as the focus of each one. Planning on the natural district unit would bring the city to the human scale and

would provide "for more orderly planning and decentralization of municipal services and community development."² Recommended was the grouping of city services in one location in each district and anticipated that each district would develop its own plan in cooperation with the City Planning Commission.

The Citizens Union felt very strongly that the sustained public support essential to effective official planning was dependent on having recognized districts within the Boroughs, each represented by a strong and effective citizen's organization. In an effort to gain support for its study, Citizens Union contacted the Mayor with suggestions for implementation of its plan. In a letter to Mayor William O'Dwyer in September, 1948, Citizens Union mentions the following: (1) the need for study areas as a prelude to recognizing communities as part to the master plan; (2) the need for administrative action to make the districts for local operation of the various departments conform to the new districts as far as possible; (3) the recommendation to consolidate local branches of city departments in a single civic center in each community; and (4) the need for a master plan for each community.³

Following Citizens Union's presentation of this proposal to both the Mayor and the City Planning Commission, City Planning, in a "Memorandum on Planning Districts for the City of New York,"

modified the recommendation and proposed sixty-six districts-- twelve for Manhattan, eleven for the Bronx, nineteen for Brooklyn, sixteen for Queens and eight for Staten Island.⁴ The districts were intended as "logical units for the planning of schools, housing, hospitals, libraries, playgrounds, local street systems and other public facilities, as well as for consideration of land use and zoning patterns."⁵

The next year, Robert Wagner, Jr., newly elected Manhattan Borough President, named a Community Planning Council of fifteen to twenty members for each of the twelve Manhattan districts recommended by the City Planning Commission. In setting up the boards, the Mayor communicated with leading citizens and civic groups in each community for their suggestions of board members, and from this list he appointed twenty-five members to each board. "Thereafter, while appointments were officially made by the Borough President, nominations originated largely in the boards themselves."⁶

According to Barney Rabinow, Director of the Comprehensive Planning Assistance Program of the Department of City Planning, and one of the major architects of the move to community planning districts and boards:

. . . it was wished to create within the machinery of municipal

government a vehicle by which the people in each community might have a more direct share in public decisions affecting the welfare of the area. The sheer size of the city and the distance between the governmental structure and the City's neighborhoods had contributed to an erosion of community identity.⁷

The Councils, however, were to consider the needs of the city as a whole as well as matters in their individual districts. Their role was defined as strictly advisory to the Borough President, and they had no power, little responsibility, no technical or staff resources, and "neither the mandate nor the capacity to be fully representative of the community or to coordinate its activities."⁸ One of the first matters in which they were involved was in responding to the recommendations for rezoning of the city.

When a new City Charter was adopted in November, 1961, it included provisions for division of the city into community district planning boards for each district. Section 83 of the Charter called for the establishment, by March 1, 1968, of a map of community districts within each borough, such districts to coincide as far as possible "with the historic communities from which the City has developed and shall be suitable as districts to be used for the planning of community life within the City."⁹ Section 84 called for the establishment of a community district planning board for each of the community districts to: (1) advise the borough president in any matter relating to the development or welfare of the district and any

matter which is referred to it by the borough president; and (2) advise the City Planning Commission and Borough Improvement Board on request or at its own initiative in respect to matters pertaining to the district. The City Planning Commission was instructed to provide technical assistance to the boards.

The Charter's provisions for the establishment of the boards, although widely accepted in concept, left unresolved many important questions about how the community districts and boards were to be used.

. . . it has long been urged as one of the major benefits of community districts that they can be used not only for planning and advisory purposes but for the actual administration of those city agencies which have decentralized operations. This would replace the present overlapping crazy quilt of unrelated departmental districts and substitute for most purposes a single set of administrative districts. . .¹⁰

As a result of these unresolved questions, the Citizens Union and Citizens' Housing and Planning Council established a joint committee of "knowledgeable New Yorkers" to examine the Charter sections relating to the community boards and make recommendations for official action. The report, "A Program for Community Districts," summarized the findings and recommendations of the joint committee, and outlined a plan which the committee felt would provide the mechanism for fruitful cooperation between citizens and governmental officials.¹¹ In recognizing the positive benefits of

providing a mechanism which would assist citizens and governmental officials seeing each others' points of view, the committee recommended that the boards go beyond physical planning and become involved with social and governmental planning as well. Towards this end, the committee recommended changing the name of the boards from "Community Planning Boards" to "Community Boards," to avoid the ambiguity of the work "planning." This was to facilitate the boards' consideration of such matters as youth unemployment, housing, schooling, recreation, etc.--all elements lying within the "development or welfare" of a district.

Other recommendations included making the advice of the boards a mandatory part of the city's operations when city policy and agency matters directly affected a board's area. "This obviously makes the advisory function an important integral part of city government and should make it challenging to those approached for board membership."¹² The committee recommended increasing the size of the boards to fifteen to twenty-five members, and to permit non-board members on committees. It felt also that rather than having the members appointed by the borough president, they should be appointed by the mayor, reasoning that the boards would reflect a city-wide rather than local point of view. They also felt that the boards would have direct access to all city departments and agencies,

since most were under the Mayor. Other recommendations included provision for a clerical and technical staff, delineation of community districts as part of the master plan, and the use of community districts for the development of civic centers.

This proposal for amending the City Charter became the foundation for a number of bills introduced in the 1966 session of the City Council. By this time, interim district boundaries and local planning boards had been established by the other borough presidents: in 1963, fourteen boards in the Bronx and seven in Brooklyn; in 1966, thirteen boards in Queens and four in Staten Island. Since the boards were not to become official until establishment of the district boundaries in 1968, their structure was flexible, and membership ranged from twenty-five to seventy-three, as noted in an article on the boards in The New York Times.¹³ The boards had become an effective vehicle for communicating views on neighborhood problems to elected officials, and advised on school sites, street widening, urban renewal and other local projects.

With 1968 as the deadline for mapping the districts, City Planning began in 1966 to determine the criteria for mapping community district boundaries. The Commission noted, however:

There is no definition given in the Charter of what is meant by historic communities and no elaboration is provided to make more detailed the orbit of concerns which might appropriately be

encompassed in the planning of community life within the city. Because of these omissions, it has been necessary for the City Planning Commission to develop more specific definitions and to provide opportunities for interested citizens and organizations to share in thinking through relevant criteria to meet the Charter's directive.¹⁴

In order to survey selected organizational opinion, the Commission mailed survey forms to seventy-five city-wide civic groups, local planning boards and borough-wide organizations on July 7, 1966, and asked them to rate various criteria for delineating district boundaries. Among these were administrative service districts, political and historical factors, population and statistical factors, and physical and topographical factors. There was considerable controversy, and suggestions ranged from retention of existing boundaries, to minor modification in these boundaries, to patterning them on traditional lines and popularly named districts. While city-wide organizations advocated following census tracts or health areas, borough and neighborhood organizations disagreed.

The criterion supported by the majority of respondents, both in the survey and at a public hearing in September of 1966, was for an historical district defined as the current popular name for the area. This tended to create a problem, however, since some of the areas were small, isolated pockets, while others referred to historical communities that no longer existed. It was eventually

decided to set the size at a minimum of 125,000 residents and a maximum of 300,000. Staten Island, with the smallest population, was to have four districts as a maximum.

In the same year, a number of bills were introduced in the 1966 session of the New York City Council which suggested changes in the 1961 Charter provisions concerning planning boards and districts. One of these was the O'Connor bill (No. 26) proposed by the City Council President and modified by the Joint Committee of Citizens Union and Citizens' Housing and Planning Council. It provided for appointment of planning board members by a single elected official--the Borough President; increased membership; elimination of the residency requirement; mandatory referral by the City Planning Commission to the boards in matters concerning their areas; and provision for fund allocations and for office space.¹⁵ Since the bill recommended no Charter change in the appointment procedure, neither a referendum nor State action was required--only a local law.

One issue at this time was the appointment procedure. Some recommended a three-way procedure whereby board members would be appointed by the Mayor, the Borough Presidents, and the Councilmen from the particular area. Those opposed to this raised a number of problems: factional splits, staffing, accountability, district

lines (Councilmanic districts were different from planning board boundaries).

Official adoption of the boundaries, as mandated by the 1961 Charter, occurred in 1968. The next year, 1969, Local Law 39 was passed, amending the Charter, and greatly expanding the responsibilities and size of the boards. The law reflected to a large degree that proposed by the Joint Committee in 1964. The name of the boards was changed from Community Planning Board to Community Board in conscious recognition of the expansion of the boards' role from strictly planning concerns to one of concern for all aspects of community life. The law recognized the need for the boards to be the link between the people of their districts and the government of the city, and for their area of concern to extend to programs and policies as well as structures, and to people and services as well as things.¹⁶

Under the new legislation the community boards were mandated to develop plans for the districts' welfare and orderly development; advise any officer, agency or legislative body with respect to any matter relating to the welfare of the districts; hold public or private hearings or investigations with respect to any such matters; and cooperate and consult with the local administrators or public agencies within their districts. (See Appendix A.)

The fact that the community boards are continuing to receive serious consideration for continued involvement in plans suggesting further decentralization of city services is indicative of the accomplishments they have made since the passage of Local Law 39. The next chapter will consider the actual provisions of the law and their implementation on individual community boards.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY BOARDS UNDER LOCAL LAW 39

With 62 planning districts in the City of New York operating within five different boroughs, it is difficult to generalize about the boards as a whole in discussing the general provisions of Local Law 39. This chapter will attempt, however, to discuss the rights, functions, and structural nature of the boards with specific examples given to illustrate: (1) how various boards have interpreted the law; (2) the ramifications of these provisions and difficulties in carrying them out; and (3) some of the strengths and weaknesses of the boards as a whole. The sections of the law have been regrouped into broad areas of discussion and include membership, representation, compensation, terms and methods of removal, conflict of interest, operating procedures, responsibility and accountability, resources, planning functions, relations with agencies, and communication of information to the district. The full text of the law can be found in Appendix A.

Membership

Local Law 39 states that each board shall consist of not more than fifty persons appointed by the Borough President, after consultation with the district councilmen, and who have a residence or a business, professional or other significant interest in the district. Members serve for overlapping terms of two years, one-half of the membership renewed each year. The Councilman at Large shall also be a member of the board. In making such appointments the Borough President shall give due regard to representation for each neighborhood within such district. In addition, no more than twenty-five percent of the appointments may be city employees.

There is no standard procedure whereby names of individuals to be considered for board membership are submitted to the Borough President. Some people hear about the boards and apply on their own; others are members of civic organizations that seek to have community representation through board membership; some are recommended by members of the Borough President's staff and other city agencies; in some cases, board chairmen or members seek particular individuals for membership either because they feel some areas of their community are underrepresented or seek support for their own concept of the direction a board should go, the kinds of decisions it should be making, and so forth. In other words, they may

be trying to balance some vested interests in their board, or offset more conservative members. This input, however, varies considerably with individual boards. One report from the Charter Revision Commission, for example, cites an example in Brooklyn, where one community board chairman said the board's lack of input into the selection process constituted a major problem.¹ He felt that a disproportionate number of the Borough President's appointments to his board were from a particular political club and that the Borough President was "loading" the board with members favoring a proposed Urban Development Corporation project in the district. In another case, the new chairman of Community Board 3 in Staten Island requested that he be allowed to have some input into the selection process and was told flatly that although the request was understandable, it was entirely within the Borough President's prerogative to make the appointments alone. Several weeks later, however, when the chairman of Staten Island's Board 2 recommended five individuals for membership in order to considerably broaden community representation, all five were accepted.

All individuals seeking membership must fill out an application for board membership. Again, there is no standard form, and a review of applications over the years shows a wide variety of forms. Among the information solicited by the Borough President's office is

applicant's address, length of residence in the district, education, employment background, membership in civic organizations, other interests, and the areas of specific interests on the board. The variation in applications, the fact that a resume may substitute for an application, and the lack of any record of formal interview or screening process in the applicant's file make it difficult to collect data on board membership over a period of time.

The process for selecting board members from the list of applicants differs in each borough. In Manhattan, for example, the Borough President and the Councilmen personally interview each prospective board member, while the staff conducts the interviews in the other boroughs. Board 2 on Staten Island had a formal screening process a few years ago, which was dropped, but will again be instituted in the spring of 1974.

In October 1972, Manhattan instituted a six-month probationary period whereby a potential member had to serve as a working member of a committee first and if, after six months, that person was evaluated by the board under agreed guidelines, he could then be appointed to the board as an active member. Although slightly modified since then, the procedure still exists in principle. In a study conducted for the Charter Revision Commission, a questionnaire was mailed to over two thousand community board members.² One of

the questions concerned the advisability of more comprehensive selection procedures. Seventeen chairmen favored screening panels, nine supported public solicitation of potential appointees, eight felt that candidates should be interviewed by the board or a committee of the board; a few favored nomination by civic and neighborhood associations.³

In no case, however, does Local Law 39 specify criteria for qualifications for board membership, other than that the applicant must be a resident of the district or have a business, professional or other significant interest in the district. The result is that new members generally are aware of some specific problems in their area, but lack knowledge on provisions of the zoning ordinance, the board's relationship to the Borough President's office and city agencies, their roles as board members, expectations of them by the board, and the zoning and planning process. Efforts to date to train new members have been conducted primarily by the Borough President's office or the borough offices of the City Planning Department, but apparently with limited success. One community board study prepared for the Charter Revision Commission discusses a recent effort by the Director of Community Boards for Queens to develop a Capital Budget manual to be distributed and reviewed at meetings of all the boards in the borough.⁴

The best attempt to deal with this problem would seem to be the training programs conducted by the Department of City Planning and the Bureau of the Budget to familiarize board members with the mechanics of zoning and the Capital Budget process. The Commission's study notes that at the first session of these training programs at Queens College, 300 board members participated (of approximately 2,500 in the city).⁵ In-depth sessions were later held in each of the boroughs. According to the staff, the Planning Commission was pleased with the subsequent high level of input from the boards submitting capital budget priorities for their districts. In addition, City Planning is in the process of preparing a Community Planning Handbook of each district for individual board members, to include relevant information on the Capital Budget, population, schools and education, housing and urban renewal, economic development, social services, health and hospitals, police and fire, parks, libraries and institutions, environmental protection, transportation and traffic, and zoning and land use. Included will be demographic data, maps, directories of city agencies and community organizations, and outlines of procedures followed in such matters as Capital Budget preparation and zoning changes. City Planning has also prepared a zoning manual with detailed information on the various zones, their restrictions, floor area ratio, etc., and is

using these in training sessions.

Representation

According to Local Law 39, it is the responsibility of the Borough President to appoint members in such a way as to "give due regard to representation for each neighborhood with such district."

What, however, is meant by representation?

Does adequate representation mean, for example, that the percentage of members on a board for each social, economic or racial group is the same percentage for each of those population groups within the district? Or, does it instead mean that the various social structures in the districts, such as the schools, the churches, the businesses, the civic associations, are each represented on the board. Or finally, does it mean that the members of the board are responsive to the full range of concerns and needs of all the people in the district? Geographical representation . . . does not necessarily guarantee any of the above.⁶

Geographic representation has been expanded to include racial, ethnic, economic and professional elements. A study for the Charter Revision Commission found that 33 percent of the 800 respondents felt that their board is not representative, most often mentioning underrepresentation of particular economic, geographic, and minority groups.⁷ Charges have been made that homeowners are preferred to apartment dwellers; that one political party dominates board membership; that not enough young people are represented. One thing is certain--the boards tend to be representative of the active and organized segments of a community. Particularly

where newcomers are of a different racial or economic background, board representation is not in proportion to their numbers in the community, and boards in racially changing neighborhoods still tend to be predominately white.

The Borough President is subject to pressure from the boards and from specific underrepresented community groups to equalize representation. As noted earlier, one Staten Island board chairman, upon noting that areas of his community were underrepresented, requested that the Borough President appoint members from those areas. Another chairman mapped the residences or specific areas of interest (i. e., business, institution, etc.) of his board's members in order to determine if too many people were representing one area. Board 1 on Staten Island has a large grouping of members from an area known as Westerleigh and is working towards a more even distribution of membership. All of this has come to the Borough President's attention, and he has said he will make an effort to keep this in mind in making new appointments. Related to this is the mandate of Local Law 39 that city employees may not exceed 25 percent of the members on any one board. What, however, is the definition of a city employee? Is the definition applicable only to civil service employees in city agencies, or should it extend to anyone receiving a check from the city, e. g., elementary school teachers,

policemen, and people who work for City University? When it was brought to the Borough President's attention by a board chairman that one board in particular was dangerously close to violating the Charter mandate, he decided to use the latter as the criterion.

As a consequence of the charges of unfair representation, various people have advocated electing board members, or using a process of partial appointment and partial election.

No other issue seems to generate such strong opinions from board members and chairmen as does the selection of members, and election of board members in particular. One chairman in Manhattan saw election of board members as the only way to make the board truly representative of the community and particularly the poor and minority groups in the community. A chairman in Queens, however, said she was "scared to death" of elections because it would open the board up to special interests.⁸

In the study for the Charter Revision Commission, board members were asked, "Do you favor election or appointment of members?" Fifty-eight percent were in favor of appointments; 25 percent were in favor of elections; 10 percent favored a mixed system; and 6 percent had no opinion.⁹ Various reasons are advanced in opposition to an election process, among these the fact that elections would make the boards too political; would be costly for individuals running for membership; would be subject to takeover by organized self-interest groups; might result in a low turnout which would hamper board representation; and would discourage many

qualified individuals from running.¹⁰ Those favoring elections, however, cited equally strong reasons: the present appointment process was not representative; elections would be the most democratic way to select people who would have a major role in shaping the welfare of the district; elections would result in accountability to the people; and abuses of appointive power would be avoided. It is obvious that both systems have drawbacks, and the questions remain unresolved at this time.

Compensation

This is another area where questions are raised from time to time. Board members must give a great deal of time to evening meetings; it is estimated that board chairmen give up to 20 hours of their time each week on board activities. Compensation would be valuable in two ways: (1) it would encourage members to attend meetings regularly and give some financial recognition of their participation; (2) it would greatly facilitate lower-income members to participate in board activities. One suggestion has been to compensate members for such expenses as babysitting and transportation rather than supplying direct compensation per se.

Terms and Method of Removal

Local Law 39 provides that members of community boards

shall serve for overlapping terms of two years, one-half of the membership being renewed each year. There is no limit stated on the number of times a member may be reappointed. The Manhattan boards have instituted a rotation device to provide greater opportunity for persons to serve while taking advantage of the expertise of the boards' older members. A certain number of members are dropped each year, with reappointment then based on specific criteria and a rating system by a committee of the board. Recommendations are then made to the Borough President.

Removal within the two-year appointment period is at the Borough President's option whenever a member has three consecutive unexcused absences from regular board meetings or unexcused absences from more than one-half of the meetings in any one year. This has not been enforced on the Staten Island boards until very recently, when pressure from individual board chairmen forced the Borough President to remind all members of this section of Local Law 39. Board meetings reflect the seriousness with which the boards now consider this section; there is very careful attendance taking with care to mention who has excused absences. The large amount of work to be done at regular board meetings and in committees, plus the importance of being informed of individual issues, necessitate regular involvement.

As the enforcer of this section of the law, the Borough President is placed in an awkward position if removal becomes necessary. At times he may be accused of removing members because they are "troublemakers"--that is, they may not cooperate in specific matters with Borough Hall; they may support someone politically "unpalatable" to the Borough President; they may bring to public attention some aspect of the boards that the Borough President wishes not to be so obviously involved with (such as lack of representation). One of the research papers for the Charter Revision Commission suggests that criteria for removal would remove the Borough President from bearing the personal brunt of removal and make him merely the enforcer of the regulation.¹¹ This is particularly important if the person to be removed is politically powerful.

Conflict of Interest

The fact that a number of board members have business and professional interests in the community that may potentially affect their views on matters likely to come before them as members of their community boards has necessitated a formal review of the matter by Corporation Counsel. In its recently released "Opinion No. 305," Corporation Counsel noted:

We believe it is desirable for Community Boards to include within their membership persons with varied skills and interests,

such as architects, engineers, lawyers, social workers, building contractors, brokers, businessmen, realtors and especially those who are aware of community problems. This expertise is very important for the achievement of community objectives If the Community Board is to be truly representative, conflicting interests on the part of its members are inevitable.¹²

In coming to terms with the problem, Corporation Counsel took two items into consideration: (1) the fact that the boards have a large membership, thereby significantly reducing the amount of influence one member could have on the rest; and (2) the advisory nature of the boards. For these reasons, Corporation Counsel has concluded in this Opinion that individual members are free to participate in discussions before the boards, as well as vote on the matters, even when they have a financial or other private interest in the outcome of the board's deliberations, but that such members must disclose to the board, in writing and prior to the meeting, the nature and extent of this interest. The Opinion, however, repeats for the benefit of board members the prohibition in Section 1106 of the Code of Ethics which prohibits city officials serving without compensation from representing private interests before the agency with which they are involved. Corporation Counsel feels very strongly that "no person should use his official position to promote his professional interests."¹³

Operating Procedures

Local Law 39 provides that each board shall meet at least once a month except during July and August, each board to elect its own officers and keep a public record of its proceedings. It may create committees on matters relating to the welfare or development of its district and employ such assistants as it may require within appropriations provided or with funds contributed for that purpose. An annual report to the Mayor and Borough President within three months of the end of each year and such other reports as either may require are mandated by the law. Most boroughs also have by-laws which spell out even further the nature of the agenda, the responsibilities of the chairman and committee chairmen, and the procedures for appointment and removal. All of the boards operate according to Robert's Rules of Order unless they have made a special provision (or by-law) to alter that procedure.

As a consequence of the large amount of work the boards must handle, much of the work is done through committees. These are of three kinds: standing committees dealing with the major functions of city government; specialized functional committees; and area committees. Most boards have standing committees that deal with such areas as zoning, transportation and traffic, police and fire, parks and recreation, capital budget, and health. The best

committees are those that undertake thorough research on an item, determine community sentiment through established civic groups and public hearings, and are able to present the issues clearly at full board meetings. One of the most important and controversial committees is zoning because of the number of items that come before it and the fact that the issues directly confront individual board members. Many boards have made a great effort to develop a zoning committee with planning, engineering, and architectural expertise in order to increase the credibility of its decisions. The zoning committee of Board 3 on Staten Island has a planner as chairman, with at least two architects as members. This is not to be construed as an immediate guarantee of success, but this particular committee is working to present reasoned findings to the board in as clear a manner as possible so that the board is able to make a credible decision. When a committee functions in this manner, the board is more likely to accept its decisions, and time is not lost at regular board meetings in lengthy discussion of the issues.

A second type of committee which focuses on the problems in individual areas of the community is the community committee, composed of both board members and non-board community residents. Community Board 12 in Queens has four area committees for its district of 280,000 people. One of the most comprehensive

community committee structures is that developed by Community Board 2 on Staten Island. A four-month-long study by City Planning delineated seven historical communities within the Planning District. The community committee established for each of these areas included three board members, one of whom was chairman, and seven community members chosen to represent the major interests and organizations within the community. Both board and non-board members vote. A number of advantages have emerged from this system: (1) service problems are handled by the community committee, and do not have to come before the full board; (2) community pressure is focused on the community committees, which are more representative of local interests than the full board; (3) the number of community members on these committees enables them to effectively monitor the delivery of city services; (4) a constituency is being built for board decisions; (5) the wider community input builds a stronger base for establishing budget priorities; (6) there is an opportunity for less active and unorganized members of the community representing a certain percentage of concern to become involved; and (7) the "burden" of work is shared. In one example, the community committee invited the Urban Development Corporation to study the feasibility of doing a major development of 3500 housing units. Despite the Urban Development Corporation's usual cool reception on

Staten Island, the community committee's broad community representation resulted in the full board backing the study.

Responsibility and Accountability

Public accountability of board matters is mandated through Local Law 39 in the following ways: (1) the boards must furnish the Borough President with a copy of every written communication or statement giving advice to public officers, agencies or legislative bodies; (2) they may hold public or private hearings; (3) they must render an annual report to the Mayor and the Borough President within three months of the end of each year and such other reports as the Mayor or Borough President shall require (such reports to become part of the City Record); (4) they shall keep minutes of meetings and furnish copies to the Borough President who shall be the custodian for all the records of the boards; and (5) they shall use all practical means to keep the public informed on matters relating to the welfare or development of the district.

In actual fact, the boards are remiss about fulfilling the Charter mandates relative to annual reports. The overall structure of the boards has tended to be flexible and differs from board to board. There are, therefore, no standard operating procedures for holding public hearings, or for the recording of minutes, or the

monitoring of correspondence. Because the Borough President is ultimately responsible for the boards' records, the boards' accountability becomes the Borough President's responsibility. The consultant to the Staten Island community boards, at the request of the Borough President, has been making a concerted effort to regularize the activities of the boards in order to pin down the areas of responsibility for particular matters. A series of meetings over the last year has resulted in defining, e. g., the responsibilities of the secretaries, how the minutes are taken, what is recorded, who signs them, who receives them, etc. Much time was spent in discussing whether civic groups should receive copies, so that they would be informed of what was happening at their community board's meetings, but the secretaries (as well as other board officers) were reluctant to "flaunt" their decisions before groups that might take issue with them and potentially "cause trouble." A newsletter was suggested as a preferable alternative to inform residents of matters relating to their community. There is, however, no formal procedure in general for reporting decisions back to the communities.

This lack of organization among many of the boards is tied in with a corresponding lack of consciousness on the part of board chairmen concerning their own board's internal organization. When questioned in the survey about five major achievements of their

boards in the last year, only the Bronx chairman cited organizational developments within the board.¹⁴ The other chairmen focused on new programs, controlling development, etc., while the Bronx chairman cited increased output from members, more efficient committee functioning, more representative membership, use of local area planning office staff, and increased number of presentations before city boards and agencies.

These results reflect what are considered to be three stages in the development of community boards.¹⁵ Although it would be difficult to categorize all boards in one stage or another, and in some cases a board might reflect portions of each stage at any one time, they can be used as a tentative guide. The first stage reflects a strong chairman and a lower level of organization:

The major characteristics of this stage seem to be a high level of personalization, in the chairmen, a minimum division of labor, and an emphasis on personal and quite often political relationships in dealings with agencies or public officials . . . the efforts of the boards are focused in and through a strong leader. In fact it may be because these boards have such strong leaders, who in many cases are highly talented, motivated and astute individuals, that they have not developed a higher level of organization.¹⁶

In the second stage of development there is increasing division of labor with committees rather than the chairman doing the major portion of work. Like the first stage, however, "the board views itself as that body within the community which is given responsibility

for deciding what is in the best interest of the community."¹⁷ Most boards follow one of these two examples. Only a few boards have developed or are well into developing into the third stage, in which there is a shift in the basic role of the board and the way in which it relates to the community.

Rather than being the body which decides for the community the community board becomes the facilitator and manager of a much larger citizen participation process in which the community becomes more directly involved in the work of the board . . . decision making is pushed down the organizational ladder.¹⁸

It is the committee structure and its interrelationship with the wider community that characterizes this stage, as well as the sharing of decision-making power. Organizational aspects of this stage include the development of area committees, increased use of non-board members on committees, community conferences, and the establishment of special task forces to deal with particular problems. One of the best examples of stage three is Board 2 on Staten Island, which, as noted earlier, has seven functioning area committees composed of both board and non-board members, all with voting power. One of these committees extended an invitation to the Urban Development Corporation to plan a project for its community. Another committee, when frustrated by its inability to deal with the housing problem in the community, organized an independent, non-profit corporation of community residents to plan and sponsor new housing. With the

increasing number of projects that come before the boards, the amount of research and community input that must go into each one, the increasing involvement with service delivery, and the recognition that the boards must not only react to what is happening in their communities but also take initiative, it is obvious that better organization and devolution of decision making will facilitate this process.

Resources

Local Law 39 states that each board "may employ such assistants as it may require within appropriations therefore or using funds contributed therefore," and that the "Borough President shall provide suitable administrative assistance to expedite and coordinate the work of such boards." In addition, they are to receive the professional assistance of the director of City Planning as well as any information from city agencies that is required for their work.

The Borough President for Staten Island, as one example, provides out of his own budget an administrative staff for the four boards. This includes a director who is responsible for the overall operation of the community board office, personnel, and any administrative matters; a coordinator for each board who acts as a liaison between the board and the Borough President's office; and a consultant to the boards who is primarily a technical staff person. All

of these staff members are hired by the Borough President without prior consultation with the community boards, with the result that a sense of suspicion on the part of the boards exists. Some Staten Island boards are attempting to keep their coordinator and consultant out of the board's internal operation, on the assumption that these people represent the Borough President's interest instead of their own.

Up until January 1973, the community boards received \$4500 each in the operating budget, the bulk of which went for administrative assistance in the Borough President's office. At the beginning of 1973, the Mayor announced that each community board would receive a total appropriation of \$10,000. Although the Staten Island boards, for example, continued to receive secretarial help, the balance of the funds, approximately \$5100, was never forthcoming from the Bureau of the Budget. The boards continued to pressure the Borough President's office for the balance, and it was finally announced in March of 1974 that about \$5140 was being made available to each of the four Staten Island boards. The individual line item allocations were based on budgets submitted to the Bureau of the Budget by each board. Each board now receives the following: stenographic services, \$1200; press releases, mail services, miscellaneous, \$800; general services, \$900; expert services, \$1187;

rent, \$500; periodicals, \$125; special services, \$150; membership in professional organizations, \$125; and carfare, \$150.

For the first time since their formation, the boards have a substantial amount of money to work with outside of the daily administrative assistance they already receive, although the funds are controlled through the Borough President's office. Guidelines for the expenditure of these funds have been prepared by the Bureau of the Budget and were made available at a special budget workshop in all the boroughs. The Borough President for Staten Island seemed interested in seeing that the boards not only receive these funds but that they would have as much latitude in spending them within the guidelines as possible.

Whether this funding will be adequate depends on the continued workload of the boards and the extent to which they are involved in decision-making. Although they receive assistance from Borough Hall and the Department of City Planning, it has been deemed inadequate for meeting board needs. In some cases the boards desire to hire their own assistants and conduct their own studies independent of Borough Hall and City Planning. In other cases, they are interested in setting up an office in their respective communities to be more available to the residents. Both of these will require funding beyond the \$10,000. When the boards have requested specific

studies for their areas, the funding has been provided by the Borough Improvement Boards and are often done in cooperation with City Planning. For example, Community Boards 13 and 14 in Queens commissioned a comprehensive study for the Rockaway area for \$75,000; a Manhattan board commissioned a \$12,000 study to determine the best future development for the area underneath the Williamsburg Bridge; four Manhattan boards hired consultants to help them properly evaluate the plans for the proposed West Side Expressway at a combined cost of \$100,000. The studies have varied according to the perceived needs in individual districts.

Functions: Planning

It is in the area of planning that the boards have devoted most of their time. As noted earlier in the history of the boards in New York City, the word 'planning' was dropped from the boards' title in Local Law 39, signifying a change in emphasis from primarily planning activities to both planning and service delivery. As one chairman from Queens put it: "They have dropped 'Planning' (from the title) probably for a very simple reason; nobody really cares about planning in Queens. They care about services."¹⁹ There are many examples of the kinds of planning projects in which the boards have been involved: a Manhattan board pressured the Transit

Authority to modify its plans for construction of the new Queens-Manhattan subway under Central Park to save park land; a coalition of boards formed a task force to study the West Side Highway; a joint task force studied the desirability of a high-speed, non-stop railroad from Kennedy Airport to New York City; the boards were asked for recommendations on the location of new tennis courts. In addition, there are the countless requests for zoning changes and variances, as well as development plans that come before the boards. Any request for a zone change or variance must come before the board after formal submission to City Planning, and the recommendation of the involved board is necessary before the request proceeds to a hearing. Local Law 39 states that all city agencies (except the Board of Estimate, HDA, EPA, Police Department, and City Council), where a public hearing is required, must first notify the relevant community board of the matter. In addition, capital projects proposed by City Planning, and projects proposed by the Site Selection Board, also may have input from the affected boards. If the board has not had time to consider the proposal, it may request one time that the hearing be adjourned.

An important aspect of the boards' involvement in the planning process and their ability to effectively and competently consider plans for their areas is their relationship with the City Planning

Department and Commission. Each local area planning office in the individual boroughs assigns a staff member to each board who regularly attends and services the community boards. Staff members often attend committee meetings as well. As an example, the staff member assigned to Staten Island Board 3 recently attended a meeting of the Richmond Avenue Task Force to explain to new committee members two proposals for residential and commercial development. A number of planning considerations were raised by the project because of the fact that the developers were requesting a zone change to allow commercial on their residentially-zoned property, thereby increasing the likelihood of community opposition to the project, and because the developments are located in what is a congested area. It was important that the committee understand what the developer was requesting, as well as the Planning Department's attempts to work for the community's interest in line with what the developer could achieve anyway within the zoning ordinance. It is clear that the Planning Department recognizes that it must work with the boards in order to reduce opposition that may otherwise "kill a project."

It would appear that most boards, because of time limitations, are forced to react to proposals presented to them, or about which they hear from various civic groups. There has been little

opportunity to take the initiative and actively plan for the future of their communities. Efforts are being made, however, particularly in those boards that are close to or have entered stage three, as discussed earlier, where community committees and planning committees are setting the priorities for their areas, determining what can be done to reverse an unwanted direction in development or deterioration. Thus, a community committee of Board 3 in Staten Island and the zoning committee have planned to work more closely, so that when an issue comes before the zoning committee, it can be discussed in the context of how the community committee would like to see the overall area develop.

It is hoped that the recent efforts by the Planning Commission to facilitate the board members' ability to participate in making planning decisions will continue. One report refers to the recent testimony of John Zuccotti, the Chairman of the City Planning Commission before the Charter Revision Commission, in which he outlined the Commission's new program for the boards and the rationale behind it:

Although . . . the new programs focus on "the redistribution of power, so that local matters can be decided in and with the community," the essence of the new programs is to provide more adequate technical assistance to the boards and to give them greater input into the decision making process, and thus basically strengthen and expand their existing role under Local Law 39.²⁰

Four programs have been developed with the boards by the Planning Commission: (1) training of board members; (2) development of training manuals and information reports to assist the boards in their work; (3) comprehensive planning workshops; and (4) earlier input by the boards into the operating budget process by determining five priority projects for each district. Since the first three have already been discussed, the operating budget will be mentioned briefly.

While the law provides that the community boards shall hold public hearings and give advice to the City Planning Commission on any capital project proposed in the operating budget lying in whole or in part in its district, there is no expressed or implied power, advisory or otherwise, with respect to the expense budget.

Most of the boards in all of the boroughs hold public hearings on the capital budget and advise the Borough President of the priorities which they wish to see emphasized in any year. Some of the boards have been instrumental in adding or deleting items from the capital budget and others have been expert at following a project through the capital budget procedure and hurrying it along at various points in the system.²¹

What the boards would prefer, however, would be to become involved in the process at a much earlier date, thereby being able to conduct surveys in their districts and submit operating budget requests at the same time as city agencies submit theirs.

Relations With Agencies

Local Law 39 requires that the community boards advise, either on their own initiative or when requested, any public agency on matters relating to the welfare of their districts, both by cooperating and consulting with the local administrators of city departments and agencies and by assisting them in transmitting information to the people of their districts. Most city agencies must refer matters to the boards where a public hearing is required, and the board's recommendations or lack of them are to be noted in the record of the hearing. A most important section of the law, and one which will come up repeatedly later in the paper, is the requirement that the agencies give to the boards "such information necessary for their work which they shall require."

In spite of the rights listed in Local Law 39 vis-a-vis the agencies, the boards nonetheless remain advisory bodies without any decision-making powers. The results of the community board questionnaire showed that board members believe the major impediment to "effectiveness" (which, incidentally, is never defined) is the boards' lack of adequate powers. Forty-seven percent of the respondents noted lack of cooperation from city agencies as significantly impeding their effectiveness.

Getting adequate information from the agencies was considered by the majority of the chairmen as at least half of the problem. One chairman in Queens said it was 90% of the problem and added that if the community boards had such difficulty getting information, there was no wonder that so many of the people of New York feel cut off from government and alienated.²²

The main problems seem to be the timing of when information is received, the lack of response when information is solicited, the inadequacy of information that is communicated, the lack of board power to force agency responsiveness, and the uncertainty of the boards in knowing exactly what kind of information is required. One Charter Commission report cites two examples of the way in which a committee of one board dealt on two occasions with City Planning.²³ In the first, one committee of Board 2 developed criteria for evaluating federally assisted housing development proposals and provided the Department of City Planning with a copy of the criteria so that the department, which is responsible for coordinating the review of the proposals, would know in advance the kinds of information needed by the board. On the other hand, another committee of the same board, when encouraged by City Planning to institute a formal procedure for evaluating a zone change request for a controversial large-scale development, subsequently opted not to, and the project was returned to the board by the Board of Estimate because it had not received a sufficiently thorough review.

Where boards have tried to solicit agency response, particularly in regard to service delivery, they have met with little success. Letters to agencies go unanswered; telephone calls are not returned; requests for agency representatives to appear at board meetings are ignored. Sometimes promises are made, and the representative or agency head fails to appear. There is increasing dissatisfaction on the part of board members that they, and their requests, which are legitimate, are so lightly ignored. In one instance in Manhattan, a community board and Borough President had been working since 1966 to force a garage owner to clean up his lot that was cluttered with cars and presented both a fire and health hazard. They had watched as the matter was referred from the Mayor's office to the Traffic Department to the Police Department to the Department of Public Works and finally to Corporation Counsel. The lot for the garage is owned by the Department of Real Estate of the city.

Although some board members have given up trying to get answers, others are searching for new ways to solicit response. The chairman of Board 1 on Staten Island, after seeking for months to get an answer from the Highway Commissioner about a sidewalk in his area, finally threatened to subpoena him. At this, the Commissioner responded and said he would attend the next board meeting. When he failed to appear, the chairman did issue a subpoena,

although it was questionable at the time whether this power is within the rights of the boards. Corporation Counsel has the question under consideration.

The Board of Standards and Appeals, City Planning, and the Borough Presidents are the exceptions to the above. The Board of Standards and Appeals has formal, written procedures for relating to the community boards, including notification, provision of full information, guidelines for public hearings and reports on board decisions. City Planning's role has already been discussed, but one additional point should be noted here. As mentioned previously, it has developed Community Planning Handbooks that include the names of all agency liaisons, and the listing eventually will include all of the programs and responsibilities for each of the agencies.

Such a listing will become important as the boards become increasingly involved in dealing with service delivery problems in their districts, as is happening, and as they begin to take the initiative in planning for their districts and recommending new programs . . . committees have considerable potential in terms of monitoring the delivery of services. . . An example of an attempt in this area comes from one of the community committees of Board 2 on Staten Island. In response to a request from one of the committee chairmen the borough office of the City Planning Commission developed a procedure for the committee to refer and follow through on service complaints but the procedure was neglected when the board changed chairmen.²⁴

The City Planning Department has taken other steps to include the boards in its decision-making process. Until 1971 its

Rules of Procedure permitted only property owners within a certain distance from the applicant's lot to testify at public hearings on applications for variances. In spite of strong opposition from real estate interests, the Mayor initiated changes that opened the hearings to other interested parties, including the community boards. These changes included: (1) notification of the board of the hearing; (2) notification to the community board by the applicant of all necessary information, including a radius diagram of the applicant's lot and site plan of the proposed development; (3) the requirement that the applicant give public notice of the application in one of two local newspapers prior to the hearing; (4) procedures for community board recommendations to the Board of Standards and Appeals; (5) notification to the community board (with reasons) if the Board of Standards and Appeals' decision is contrary to the community board's recommendation; and (6) inclusion of the community board's recommendation in the record of the Board of Standards and Appeals (and also notation if no recommendation was submitted).

Communication of Information to the District

Local Law 39 provides that the community board shall assist city departments and agencies in making contacts with and transmitting information to the people of its district. It also charges the

boards to use all practical means to keep the public informed on matters relating to the welfare and development of its district.

In spite of the number of opportunities provided to the boards to transmit information to their communities, a survey by Columbia University's Bureau of Research ascertained that only one in ten residents were aware of the existence or activities of the community board in their area.²⁵ The board members themselves acknowledge that in spite of their feeling that the existence of the community boards in their districts had increased citizen participation on local issues,²⁶ communication has remained a problem. Part of the problem is due to the lack of resources at the boards' disposal, although now that the budget has increased, this problem should be partially solved. Some boards use extensive mailings to inform area residents of meetings and public hearings. Others either mail minutes directly to civic, religious and community groups, or compose a newsletter of relevant items. The use of non-board members on area committees has extended the activities of the boards further into individual communities, and of course the presence on the boards of civic, religious and community group representatives conveys a great deal of information to their respective groups. In addition, the boards seem to be receiving an increasing amount of newspaper coverage, much of it front-page. There is a reporter

from the Staten Island Advance at all regular board meetings and public hearings, and these meetings receive regular front-page coverage the next day.

It is the public hearings, however, that have been most effective in ascertaining public sentiment, and in conveying information in turn to the public.

The ability and willingness to hold public hearings has been one of the most potent weapons in the Community Board arsenal. While the boards are not always in the forefront of an issue, they are often perceived to be non-partisan and objective and therefore can convene public meetings and act as moderator on controversial issues.²⁷

A number of boards hold as much as one hearing a month, and they are well attended. Some boards have instituted the policy of holding a public hearing prior to regular meetings. Board 4 on Staten Island, upon finding that there was such a need for community input, as well as shortage of time at regular board meetings, announced that on a specified day each month it would hold a public hearing on any issues people wanted to discuss. Response to public hearings in ghetto areas, however, tends to be very poor.

Conclusions

In reviewing the implementation of the various sections of Local Law 39, certain areas emerge as a continuing problem for many boards. One of these is the wide variation in the appointments

procedure which suggests the need for a better selection process with less involvement by the Borough President and more input by the boards themselves as well as by the district residents. This problem, in conjunction with that of poor geographic and low-income representation, underlines the advantages of elections over appointments. Although both methods have disadvantages, the arguments presented here suggest an elective process as more responsive to the community.

Elections would address another problem--accountability. The discussion has pointed out the lack of awareness of the boards by the community, and the lack of any formal procedures for informing residents of matters relating to their community. Elections would focus community interest on the boards and produce a vehicle that would work for residents rather than be an arm of the executive as they are at present.

It is important that the boards be so structured that they operate more independently of the executive branch of borough government. There is a definite need for control over funds and for a strong board role in staff selection.

Focusing towards the community rather than the office of the Borough President will not resolve the issue of lack of agency response, however. The boards are hampered both by lack of power

to force agency response and by lack of a direct political and administrative link with agencies. This will continue to hamper the boards in moving in the anticipated direction of service delivery for their communities.

The planning function, therefore, emerges as the most important function the boards have fulfilled in the past and will very likely continue to in the future. The close relationship between the boards and the City Planning Department, the efforts by the City Planning Department to increase the technical skills of board members, the established Rules of Procedure which mandate board involvement in zone changes and variances, and the appointment of a City Planning Department member as liaison to each board, are just some examples of how the boards' role as "little planning commissions" is extended.

The most effective boards, in terms of being able to handle all matters that come before them, are those that have moved into stage three and have concentrated on creating a vehicle that is well organized and responsive. The inclusion of non-board members through the community committee structure seems highly desirable in determining community priorities, extending the liaison function to the wider community, and in making the boards accountable to a wider constituency.

It is hoped that this rather generalized discussion of the most important provisions of Local Law 39 will have provided the basic framework for the more specific analysis of the four Staten Island community boards which follows. Chapter V will be devoted to the historical development of each of the four boards, with particular emphasis on their organizational structure. Since there is considerable variation in the four boards, comparisons will be made with a discussion of the implications of these differences.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OF THE BOARDS ON STATEN ISLAND¹

Until 1964 when the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge opened, connecting Staten Island to Brooklyn and thus to the rest of New York City, Staten Island had remained a fairly inaccessible, rural borough of small communities and large parcels of vacant land. Its history goes back beyond the middle of the 17th century when the Leni-Lenape Indians populated the island. English, Dutch and French settlers eventually colonized the island and settled into farming and oyster fishing. Industrialization and migration after the Civil War fostered the development of shipbuilding, brick works, and other manufacturing on the north shore and along the Arthur Kill, the body of water that divides Staten Island from New Jersey. Development slowed, however, due to the failure of a proposed mass transit link to Brooklyn in the twenties, and the Depression which followed in the thirties. For the next thirty years, the island remained somewhat isolated, since ferry service was the main access route to the rest of the city.

The bridge, however, was the turning point. The island has

become the fastest growing borough and a vast potential housing resource for New York City residents. The 1960 population of 222,000 quickly jumped to 300,000 ten years later, and at least 250,000 more people are expected by 1985.² It is continuing to attract, in part because of its dependence on automobiles, a population that is larger and younger than the city-wide average, mostly whites and overwhelmingly middle-income.

EARLY HISTORY

Establishment of the Boards

In accordance with the mandate of the 1961 New York City Charter which called for the establishment of a community district planning board for each of the community districts, Staten Island's Borough President, Robert T. Connor, established in 1966 four community boards of five to nine members each and appointed a director. Since City Planning had until 1968 to establish district boundaries for each borough, Borough Hall drew temporary boundary lines for the four areas. It was the role of the boards to: (1) advise the Borough President in any matter relating to the development or welfare of the district and any matter which is referred to it by the Borough President; and (2) to advise the City Planning Commission and Borough Improvement Board on request or at its own initiative

with respect to matters pertaining to the district. In other words, the boards were to function strictly as advisory bodies to the Borough President.

The functions of the individual boards took three forms. In the first place, they were advisory bodies which considered only matters referred to them by the Borough President, and they operated with an agenda strictly controlled by Borough Hall. Secondly, they took complaints. Thirdly, they were used by the Borough President to get input on island-wide rather than district-wide issues in order to aid him in creating an island-wide position. Throughout this period the boards functioned as very weak, political bodies in the sense that they considered only matters referred to them when it suited the Borough President; they had no role in agitating and/or organizing community matters. They would not, for example, get involved in coalescing civic organizations on a particular issue, or act as negotiators between Borough Hall, developers, and the community.

In the absence of any formalized laws defining the structure, powers and duties of the boards, Borough President Connor drew up his own set of by-laws to govern the operation of the boards.³ The by-laws came into effect in 1968 and included sections on: (1) membership and officers; (2) jurisdiction and objective of boards; (3) meeting schedule of planning boards; (4) zoning; (5) guests; (6) public

hearings; and (7) publicity. The by-laws provided for one-year terms with a limit of three consecutive terms for an individual member. (See Appendix B.)

It is clear from the by-laws that the boards were very much under the control of the Borough President and were meant to continue his use of the boards as strictly advisory bodies. For example, Section II. 3. states that matters originated by a board or referred to it by either the Borough President or a letter from the community, and which involve either the entire board area or a large part of it, should be acted upon by one of the Working Committees of the board.⁴ However, Section II. 4. goes on to say that "the only function of the Working Committee is to make recommendations to the board as a whole, and they neither correspond with residents nor give releases to the press on their recommendations."⁵

Correspondence with city agencies was also directed through the Borough President's office, and his signature appeared on all correspondence to city agencies. Where he disagreed with the recommendation, he advised his Director of Community Planning Boards to advise the chairman of the affected board of his position. When either the board or its Working Committee requested to hear officials from the local office of a city department, the request had to be channeled through the director of the boards. It was only in

relations with the City Planning Commission that the board members could confer directly.

It was in this same year that a line was established by the Bureau of the Budget to provide a full-time coordinator for each of the boards, ostensibly to service the boards, represent them at community organization meetings, investigate in the field, etc. The coordinators were appointed by the Borough President.

The following year, 1969, Local Law 39 was passed. The Borough President then created a committee composed of the four board chairmen and the director of community boards to review the 1968 by-laws and come up with a new set. When these were presented to the boards, a furor ensued, as each board questioned the Borough President's right to impose his own by-laws on the individual boards. (See Appendix C.)

The by-laws were based on existing procedure established by the Borough President and Local Law 39 and reflected in large part the 1968 by-laws.⁶ Board officers were defined. The by-laws listed seven standing committees to "study and make confidential reports on matters under their jurisdiction to the board with recommendations for board action."⁷ Functions of the board were stated broadly: the boards were to consider matters within their own boundaries, and where island-wide matters were involved, make

their recommendations to the Borough President directly. Complaints about city agencies could now be referred directly to the appropriate city agency. Operating budget recommendations were to be made "at the direction of the Borough President."⁸ Public hearings could only be called by the chairman of the board after being voted upon by the board, rather than at the discretion and under the direction of the appropriate committee.

Probably one of the most controversial sections was Section XI (the Addendum) which called for "two Service Committees that will be independent of the above regulations, but will act to assist the boards in their operations."⁹ The first was an Executive Committee composed of the present and past chairmen and vice-chairmen to "determine and set forth operating procedures and policies for the four boards and make such recommendations to the Borough President, as it deems necessary for his approval."¹⁰ It is understandable how this special committee which was authorized to establish operating procedures and policies for the boards, and which was theoretically outside the jurisdiction of both the by-laws and Local Law 39, could have aroused the concern of all community board members. The committee was very clearly accountable to the Borough President.

A second committee established in Section XI was the

Professional Advisory Committee to be composed of individuals representing various professions and appointed by the Borough President. This committee's primary function was to give professional advice and assistance to the boards on request.

These committees and the various sections of the by-laws were loudly debated by board members. Some argued that although Robert's Rules of Order stated no authority for boards to write their own by-laws, each board nonetheless had this right. The result was that after a great deal of discussion the issue was finally dropped. Although the by-laws apparently never went into effect, Boards 1 and 4 seem to have adhered to them in part, while Boards 2 and 3 have not.

Relationship with City Planning

With the exception of City Planning, the boards were ignored by other city agencies prior to Local Law 39. City Planning from the beginning of the boards' existence saw the boards as a vehicle for gaining support for its individual concerns and a place to lobby for its own interests. This recognition of the importance of community input, coupled with a genuine interest in community participation, has resulted in a positive working relationship between the Department and the community boards. In a recent interview, the new

Director of City Planning on Staten Island noted:

It has been the general policy of the City Planning Commission to strengthen the power of the community planning boards . . . While the boards are not the sole vehicle for participation in the planning process, New Yorkers are becoming more conscious of the role these local groups play . . . They are aware that it exists and is making decisions which affect them.¹¹

The continuous interest in community participation is the result of a policy established by the local planning office and continued in the hiring of new departmental members--the department seeks people with a positive orientation towards citizen input. What the department has made clear to the boards, however, is that it prefers working through the boards rather than through individual civic organizations because the boards can first focus community sentiment and then act as spokesmen for these various and frequently numerous groups.

In formalizing the relations between City Planning and the community boards, the department: (1) recognized the individual board as an "umbrella group" for civic associations; (2) asked each board to identify the community groups within its area; (3) told the boards they would recognize only established community groups and not splinter groups that tended to develop over particular issues; and (4) expected the boards to monitor public meetings involving local community issues. This official recognition by City Planning of

community groups resulted in the formation of well-organized civic groups which communicated with the boards, and the boards in turn consolidated community sentiment which they communicated to City Planning. The boards began to hold and moderate public hearings, to negotiate the formation of special task forces to discuss planning or development problems, and to subsequently advise City Planning.

Local Law 39 resulted in other changes besides formalizing relations with city agencies. The boards began to slowly expand and formalize their committee structure, enabling the major work to be handled by committees rather than every matter discussed and evaluated by the whole board. The law enabled the boards to become increasingly involved with service delivery and provided the means for interaction with city agencies. In particular, it made the boards accountable to their communities as well as to the Borough President.

Each board has grown and developed largely independent of the other boards, and each board continues to have its unique characteristics.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOARDS

Board 1

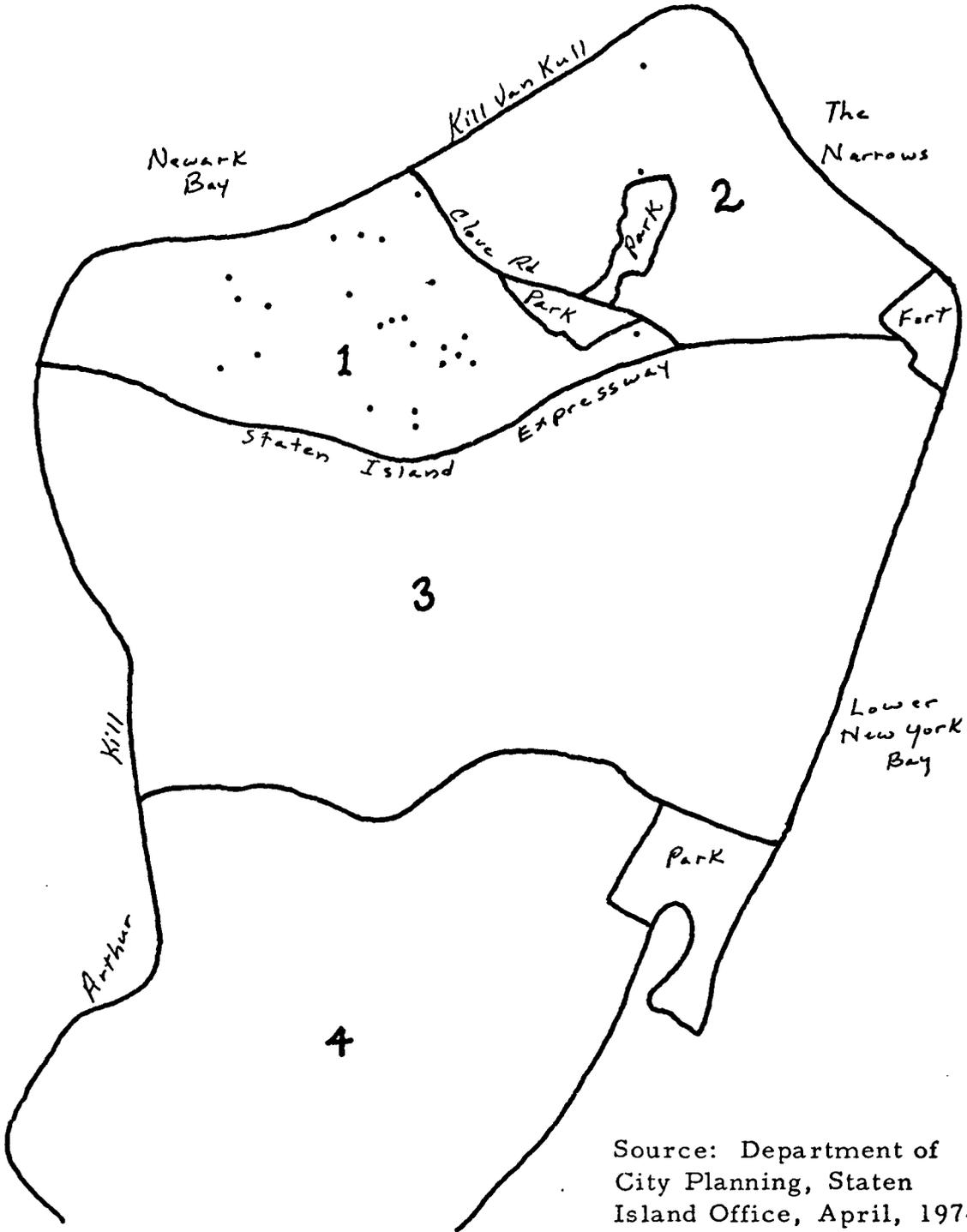
The district of Board 1 lies in the northwest quadrant of the island and is bounded by the Arthur Kill on the west, the Kill van Kull on the north, Clove Road on the west, and the Staten Island Expressway on the south, for a total of 4100 acres. The land is generally flat with large areas of marshland near the Arthur Kill, but it rises sharply towards the southeast corner as it reaches the hilly ridge which divides the eastern half of the island from the western half.

Much of the district has a white, middle-income population living in well-landscaped one and two family houses. Towards the shore, however, the economic and racial character of the area changes. Industry lines the shore, and much of it is run-down and abandoned. Housing in the area is frequently deteriorating and a larger percent is renter occupied. The Negro and Puerto Rican portion of the population, now about 7 percent, is concentrated in this area, and continues to make up an increasingly larger percentage of the population. The population in May of 1972 was 55,693, and there are thirteen identifiable communities in the district.¹²

Board 1, up until 1972, was known as a "geriatric society,"

FIGURE 1

RESIDENCE LOCATION OF MEMBERS OF
COMMUNITY BOARD 1



Source: Department of
City Planning, Staten
Island Office, April, 1974

reflecting both the older composition of its membership and the pace at which the board moved on items. All items were brought before the whole board rather than being evaluated in committees, although a committee structure existed. One example involved a zone change to enable a pork store to process sausages on its retail premises in order to have them "fresh daily." It is said that this item was before the board for three years.

The change came with new and strong leadership under an ex-marine colonel, who promptly initiated changes. Whereas board members previously discussed issues at length without resolving them, presentations were now limited to five minutes per board member. Some members did not like this and resigned. The vice-chairman began to organize the nine standing committees: Senior Citizens, Planning and Zoning, Transportation and Traffic, Schools and Education, Sanitation and Pollution, Police and Fire, Parks and Recreation, Health and Hospital, and Capital Budget. He was successful in developing regular committee meetings, so that recommendations and reports could then be brought before the whole board.

The board will be making extensive use of public hearings in the future. The zoning committee appears to be one of the best-functioning committees on the board, and one that has made a great effort to get community input on zoning matters. When necessary,

the committee goes literally from door to door of homes in the affected area, distributing leaflets announcing a proposed zone change or variance and the time of the public hearing. The sanitation and pollution committee has had extensive involvement with civic associations over flooding problems in the area. The board's transportation committee just recently met with Board 2 to discuss one of its top budget priorities, the feasibility of reopening the North Shore's rapid transit line.

In addition to these functional committees, a community committee structure has been initiated, with mapping just completed of 11 community districts within the board area. The purpose of the committees will be to establish and maintain liaison with civic organizations in the community, and to determine needs, wants, desires and problems, and refer them to the appropriate committees of the board. This is indicative of the direction the board has been moving under this year's leadership, and of its commitment to greater involvement with the residents of the area. Two months ago, in January, the chairman made assignments to individual members to contact specific civic groups, businessmen, and other organizations in order to find out what needs existed. The board then worked with City Planning to delineate the community districts, and the committees and chairmen were announced at the March meeting.

TABLE 1
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, BOARD 1

<u>Office</u>	<u>Committee Responsibility</u>
Chairman	Zoning Committee Health and Hospital Committee Schools and Education Sanitation and Sewer Senior Citizens
Vice-Chairman	Police and Fire Committee Traffic and Transportation Parks and Recreation Capital Budget
Secretary	Community Committees (11)
Treasurer	

The board is also taking the lead in searching for new ways to force agencies to respond to its requests for delivery of certain services within the district. After a frustrating effort to get a sidewalk put in, the board threatened to subpoena the Department of Highways. A staff member responded and agreed to attend a board meeting, but then never came. At its last meeting, the board decided to issue the subpoena and force the issue. This is unprecedented with the Staten Island boards.

Another problem the board has faced is poor representation. With the aid of City Planning, which interviewed members and asked for suggestions of prospective members, the board was able to broaden its membership and achieve better racial and geographic representation. It is still poorly represented in several areas: younger people, women, and Puerto Ricans. The current board membership reflects active involvement in civic organizations and community affairs, with 75 percent members of at least one civic group.¹³ There is a considerable range of occupations with fewer in the professions when compared with the other boards, although 49 percent of the members have degrees at the bachelors' level or above; two-thirds have lived in the district longer than ten years. The board currently has 28 members.

The board's present chairman feels strongly that the board, as

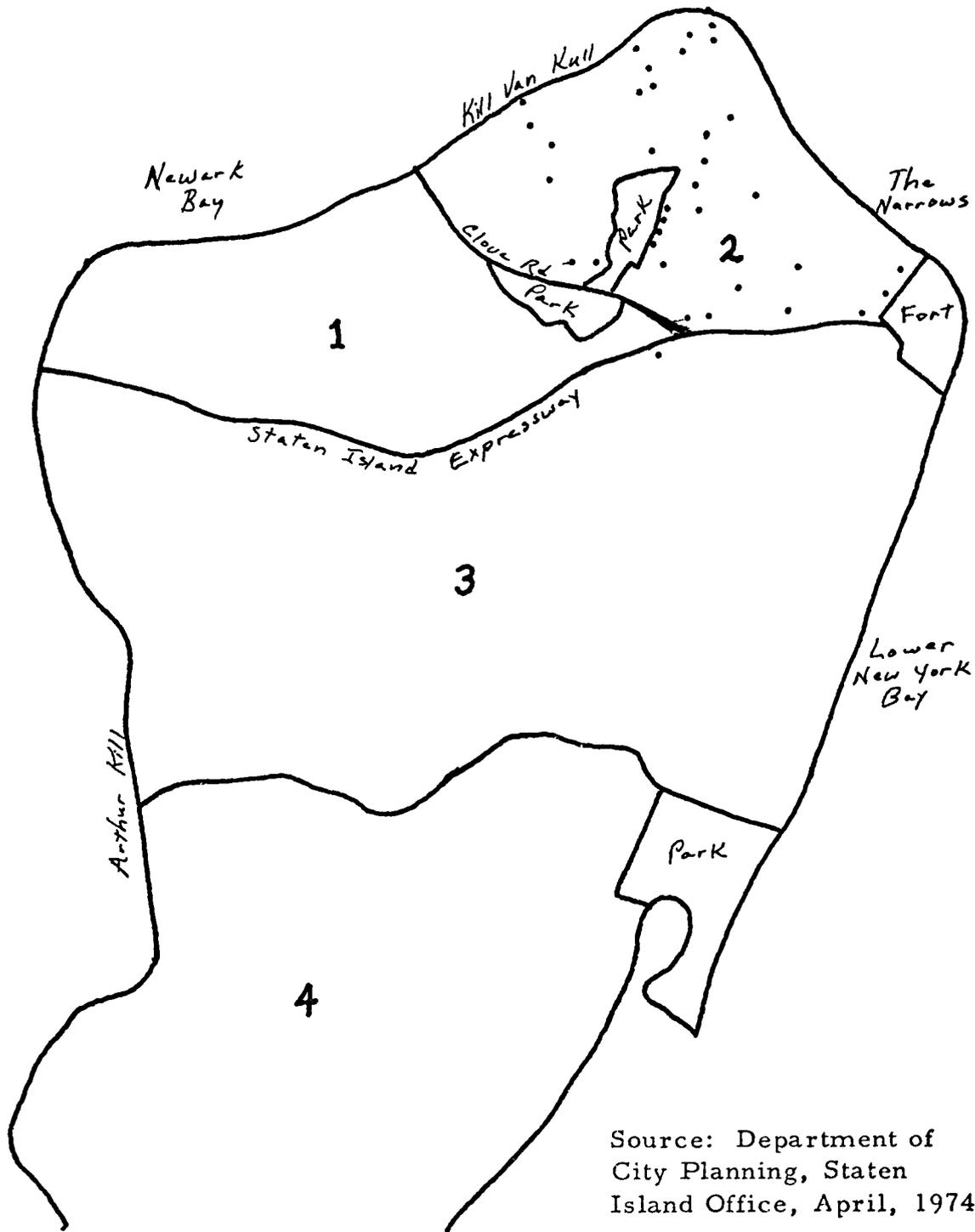
an expression of community opinion, should actively go out into the community and search for problems, poll the community, and then exercise its influence through the powers the board already has. He feels that the committee structure, both standing and community, is the best method for accomplishing this. The boards have an important role in seeing that "the little things that aggravate people" get done. He believes that if the boards as a whole can make significant steps now in this direction, if they are able to show what the boards can accomplish when given the opportunity, this will be important if and when Charter Revision comes about. It is obvious that Board 1 is moving strongly in this direction.

Board 2

The district of Board 2 is the most intensively developed part of Staten Island in terms of the concentration of government offices, transportation, and business. The boundaries include Clove Road and the Staten Island Expressway to the west and south, the Kill Van Kull to the north and the Upper Bay on the east. An island-long ridge bisects the area. The overall feeling of the area is suburban with three-quarters of the dwelling units in one and two-family homes. The shoreline communities are the oldest and most built up, with shipping and related installations on the waterfront and

FIGURE 2

RESIDENCE LOCATION OF MEMBERS OF
COMMUNITY BOARD 2



Source: Department of
City Planning, Staten
Island Office, April, 1974

residential neighborhoods inland. The 12 percent non-white population, the largest on the island, lives primarily in the older waterfront communities, many of them in one of the four public housing projects in the district.

The great increase in population, over 25 percent since 1960, is attributed primarily to the push of white middle-income families toward suburban living after the building of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge in 1964. There are fifteen defined communities within the district, with a total 1972 population of 80,339.¹⁴

Board 2 was favored early with chairmen who were politically "plugged in" and politically ambitious and who were able to create for the board a well functioning committee structure. The board was faced in 1969 with a problem that has faced all boards--members who did not participate. In an effort to force accountability, the board made study assignments to members of various areas of the community. One of these studies--that of the Jersey Street area--became the basis for the first community committee. Since the study recommended a wider area than Jersey Street for the committee, the New Brighton Committee was formed. When a major racial confrontation occurred in Jersey Street a year later (1970), it was the New Brighton Committee chairman that called a public meeting with local elected and appointed officials present to attempt a resolution.

It is this same committee that is currently heading a community-wide effort to get basic service delivery in the area.

The board subsequently focused on six other community areas and attempted to relate to existing groups and civic organizations. These committees began to hold regular public hearings.

A major activity of the board several years ago was the origination of a Leadership Conference, the purpose of which was to bring together the community committees with City Planning and board members to discuss matters of district-wide concern. The benefits of the conference were many. The board came out of the conference with a great deal of new credibility. The community benefited in that it learned of City Planning's existence and began to relate directly to the department. City Planning benefited in that it learned about the problems and priorities of communities rather than what it perceived to be the problems.

In the recent Jersey Street public hearing chaired by the New Brighton Committee, City Planning as well as other groups became aware as never before that the people of the Jersey Street area perceive their problems differently. Whereas housing was perceived to be a major problem, the area residents were more concerned with getting better police protection, day care, recreation programs, and garbage pickup. The public hearing initiated a movement on the part

TABLE 2
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, BOARD 2

<u>Office</u>	<u>Committee Responsibility</u>
Chairman	All standing committee chairmen and community committee chair- men*
1st Vice-Chairman	Personnel
Secretary	
Treasurer	

* Standing committees and community committees are autonomous
and deal directly with city agencies.

Community Committees (7)

Standing Committees: Capital Budget
Management Information Service
Parks and Recreation
Health and Hospital
Zoning
Traffic and Transportation
Sanitation and Sewer

of government, the community board, residents, and social services to join in an effort to bring better service delivery to the Jersey Street area. The result has been the opening of a police sub-station in the area, manned during the day by area residents; the establishment of an office for Human Resources Administration and the Bureau of Child Welfare; the appointment by the Borough President of one of his assistants to work full-time in the area; and an extensive committee structure of governmental officials, board members and residents, which will work towards alleviating the many problems that plague the area and which will result in the renewal of the Jersey Street area. Hopefully, this effort initiated and coordinated by Board 2 will bring permanent results.

This approach of getting area residents involved in solving their community's problems has been effective in other community committees of the board. The Stapleton community committee, for example, has representatives of the Board of Trade, the Police Precinct, city housing, Stapleton Organization Community Council, and board members. This committee is said to have been instrumental in reversing the downward trend of the Stapleton area.

The strong autonomous committee structure created by the earlier chairmen, characterized by members who "did the homework" and legwork, coordinated with city agencies, and produced

rational decisions which were presented concisely at meetings-- began to deteriorate somewhat with subsequent board chairmen. This deterioration has leveled off, but there is no question that the basic structure established early in this board's existence, and the way in which board matters were carried out, has helped to make Board 2 a "model" for other boards.

The chairman for 1974 recognizes that the board has been riding on inertia built up before, and that the committee structure has "slid." He is interested in getting the committees more organized and better operating by assigning chairmen who will really be in charge of the individual committees. He feels the recent efforts of Borough Hall and the Consultant to the boards to review the contents of Local Law 39 and thereby clarify the expectations of the boards and their rights are positive moves.

Although representation on the board is very good at present, the chairman hopes to improve it by increasing the number of blacks and women, and adding members in some geographical areas. Recently he reviewed applications for membership and recommended five people, all of whom have been appointed by the Borough President. This brings the board membership to 35 members. Board membership, according to a recent survey,¹⁵ reflects a highly educated professional level of people very active in their communities.

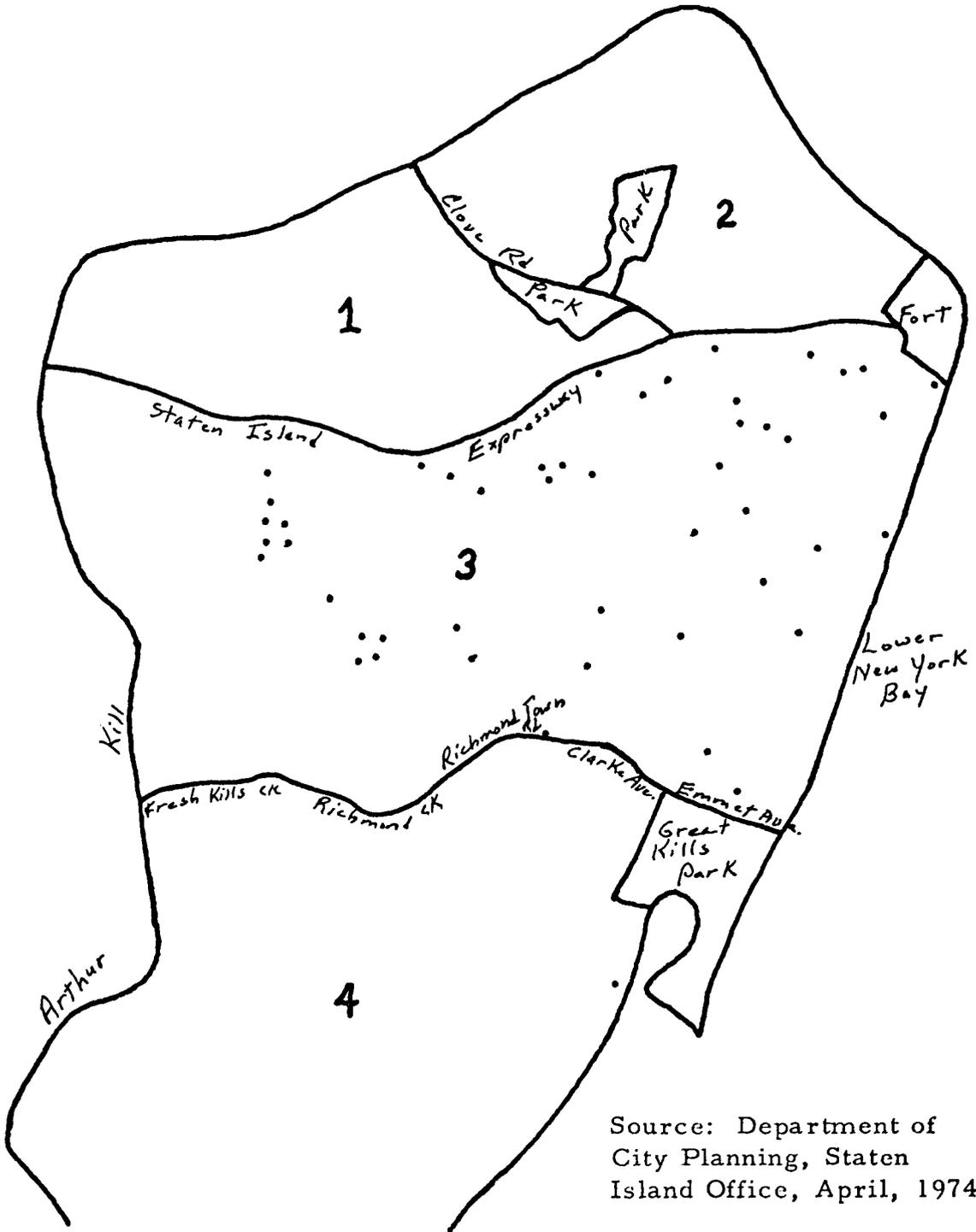
Sixty-one percent of the members have at least a bachelor's degree, 42 percent graduate degree or higher. Sixty percent are in professional occupations.

Board 3

The 13,600 acres of the district stretching from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Arthur Kill on the west are basically divided into three sections. The eastern third fronts on Lower New York Bay and is low-lying, partly marshy land, subject to flooding. The area has good access, is relatively free from smog, and has considerable beach frontage. Some vacant land is still available for development. The middle third of the district is hilly and wooded and contains some land still suitable for residential development. The area is dominated by park and institutional uses of a regional nature, including the well-known Green Belt, approximately 1700 acres of land in public and private ownership with children's camps, a wildlife refuge, city parks, and hiking trails. West of this ridge is a third portion of the district which slopes down from the ridge through large open tracts of land and recent residential and commercial development to the oily, smoggy flatlands along the Arthur Kill. Much of this portion is highly suitable for industrial development because of the excellent truck and rail access.

FIGURE 3

RESIDENCE LOCATION OF MEMBERS OF
COMMUNITY BOARD 3



Source: Department of
City Planning, Staten
Island Office, April, 1974

Like districts 1 and 2, the Board 3 area is developed primarily with one and two-family homes, although many of them were built fairly recently. This is one of the fastest growing areas of Staten Island due to the push from other boroughs for a more "country setting." The district population increased by 25,000 people from 1960 to 1970, and then by another 12,000 in the next two years alone. The 1972 population was 102,211, in twenty-three identifiable communities.¹⁶

In 1970, a year after the passage of Local Law 39, Board 3 was functioning with the usual standing committees, but on a very informal basis. The size of the board was small, and most committees consisted of only one to two members; zoning, for example, was a one-member committee. The committee member would do the background on a particular matter and then bring it up for discussion before the full board. As the board grew in the next two years and committees expanded, the committees began functioning on a more regular and formalized basis. They also moved into initiating matters rather than only responding to issues. They now perform most of the work on the board.

Unlike the areas of Boards 1 and 2, the Board 3 area has faced large and rapid increases in population in the last ten years that have had tremendous ramifications for the board. Up until approximately

1972, the board's membership reflected primarily the east shore communities--older, more established communities with long-time Staten Island residents. The surge of building on the west shore attracted many people from other boroughs, primarily Brooklyn, who, upon finding that their new communities lacked certain services, began forming civic associations. Recognizing that the west shore civic groups were not represented on the board, the chairman at the time began pushing to get more representation from the area. The "push" was aided by the presence in that area of one of the Democratic leaders close to the Borough President. As a result, there has not only been overrepresentation of the area, but also a "political" struggle for control of the board.

This struggle surfaced at board meetings initially, as the newer members to the board, primarily from the west shore area, strongly voiced their opinions with regard to further development in their area. Many of the decisions were based on the policy of keeping other people out, and reflected the special interests of their area rather than the needs of the board as a whole. In order to provide a constructive means of integrating these members into the board and to get them thinking as board members rather than solely as civic association representatives, the Richmond Avenue Task Force was formed. This community committee has been working progressively

towards developing an overall planning policy for the area, in order to provide a basis for decision making as new demands and requests are made upon the community from developers.

In spite of this committee, there has continued to be a power struggle developing on the board, and it surfaced during the election of officers for 1974. The politicizing that went on both prior to the election and during it was apparently unprecedented on any Staten Island Board. There was a phone campaign before the election by several factions to line up votes and to overthrow the slate put forth by the nominating committee. There was an attempt to put west shore people in the chairman and vice-chairman positions. The board that was elected seems fairly representative of the area as a whole, in terms of its geographic distribution.

The new officers seem to have made attempts to coalesce the board, by changing the composition of committees, appointing new committee heads, having first review on major developments, and coordinating the committees when some should be conferring on an issue involving several committees. In two recent proposals for residential and commercial development in the Richmond Avenue area, for example, the executive committee determined that the Planning, Zoning and Richmond Avenue Committees should work together on evaluating the projects, with the Planning Committee

TABLE 3
 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, BOARD 3

<u>Office</u>	<u>Committee Responsibility</u>
Chairman	Standing committees: Parks and Recreation Health and Hospital Zoning Planning Schools and Education Sewer and Sanitation Police and Fire Transportation and Traffic Legislative Committee Executive Committee Special committees: Richmond Avenue Task Force East Shore Flooding Richmondtown Restoration Staten Island Community College
Vice-Chairman	Capital Budget Public Hearings
Secretary	
Treasurer	

chairman as head.

The Richmond Avenue Task Force is the only committee that is similar to the community committees of Board 2, and there are, as yet, no non-board members on it. Until now, area committees have only been formed on an ad hoc basis in response to a specific issue, and then eliminated when the issue was resolved.

As with Boards 1 and 2, Board 3 has had quorum problems due to members who fail to show up for meetings. Pressure has come from the board to get the Borough President to enforce this provision of Local Law 39. When the previous chairman attempted this, he was told that the board should enforce it itself. Now that the complaint is coming from all the boards, the Borough President has notified all members of the provision and that it will be enforced. Board 3 is pressuring Borough Hall in other ways under the new chairman. It would like to have a say in new appointments, and it has recommended the appointment of a new coordinator for the board.

These are reflective of some of the concerns of the new chairman. In an informal interview, the current chairman of the board was asked about priority items facing the board this year. One of these, he felt, is the need for the board to become a more independent operating unit with an independent staff that is hired by the board. There has been, he felt, too much procedural control from

Borough Hall, particularly the recent efforts by the Consultant to the Borough President for structural reorganization, something he feels has no practical application unless the boards have independence.

A second priority is to develop mechanisms for overall planning, as in the Richmond Avenue Task Force, and to develop methods of control over existing zoning patterns. In other words, the board can develop a planning concept for an area and then seek to get developers to modify plans in accordance with this concept; the board can also move towards requesting rezoning of certain areas. In line with this is the recent move to coordinate the zoning and planning committees with the Richmond Avenue Task Force as requests for rezoning and development come before the board.

Since there have periodically been rumors about splitting this board district into a west shore and an east shore planning district, the chairman is very concerned that this not occur, primarily because it would tend to segregate the community politically, economically, and socially. He feels this would encourage "board fighting board" as the newer areas, which lack certain services and community facilities, would be forced to demand increases in resource allocation for their areas. Keeping the board together would help the individual communities maintain an overall perspective.

The current board the chairman is working with is the largest

on the island--49 members. It is an extremely active, highly educated group of people, 77 percent of whom belong to a civic organization, 56 percent either as a present or past officer or a member of more than one civic group.¹⁷ Like Board 2, the members have an exceptionally high level of education: 65 percent a bachelor's degree or above, 46 percent with a graduate level degree. Sixty-three percent are in professional occupations. The average length of residence is lower than in other board areas, reflecting in all probability the interest by the newer communities in community board membership. The board has one black member who does not come to meetings, and there is a small percentage (10 percent) of women on the board.

Board 4

This area of the island known as South Richmond still contains large tracts of heavily wooded and unspoiled land. About 6,500 acres of land are still vacant and surround a number of old, well-established communities with houses dating from the Federal and Victorian periods. The population explosion on the island, however, is beginning to take its toll of South Richmond. The continuing surge of white, young, middle-income families is fostering large tract development characterized by detached and semi-detached houses set

in conventional rows on small lots, on a traditional grid-iron pattern.

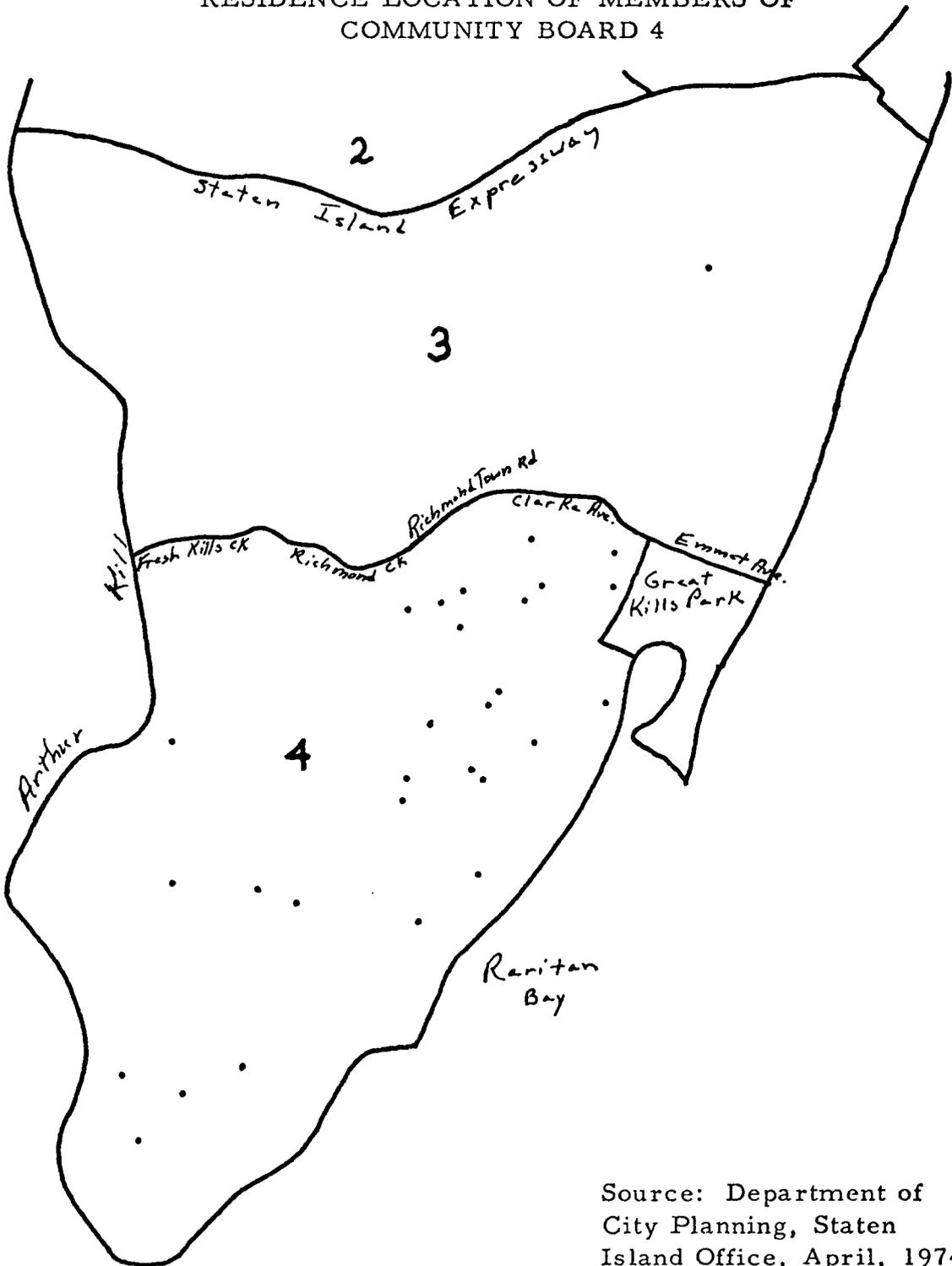
This building has strained existing public services to the point that a moratorium on the sale of much city-owned land in the area was instituted in the late sixties, but the area is plagued by flooding and sewer problems. In an effort to institute planned development for the area, the city proposed legislation several years ago to create a public benefit corporation which would develop most of South Richmond. The proposal would have allowed for up to 450,000 people to populate the area within the next twenty-five years. The people of South Richmond are long-time residents of the area, many are politically conservative, and the threat of a corporation empowered to condemn private property and develop the area was overwhelming. Their strong resistance helped defeat the proposal.

Board 4 itself has a tradition of being a very active and very political board in the sense that many of its individual members have been or are involved actively in political organizations. They have taken strong stands on issues, and have frequently expressed these feelings through their civic organizations.

Because of South Richmond's location, i. e., furthest away on the island from Manhattan, it has resisted much of the pressure from the other boroughs to develop. The board members have reflected in

FIGURE 4

RESIDENCE LOCATION OF MEMBERS OF
COMMUNITY BOARD 4



Source: Department of
City Planning, Staten
Island Office, April, 1974

large part the small-town character of the area and the local orientation to jobs, shopping, and friends. There is a sophistication, however, in a "small town meeting" way, and a strong sense of local government. It was the Marchi proposal for the planned development of South Richmond that became the first major controversial issue facing the area, and the matter which changed the board significantly. Up until that time there had been little pressure for development and little need for public hearings to "feel out" community sentiment on issues. The imminent danger of possibly 450,000 people moving into the area within twenty-five years, the possibility of condemnation of private property, the uncertainty of a public benefit corporation and lack of control over it, and the threat to their entire life style produced organized resistance on a large scale.

This pressure for development is going to continue, and the board fortunately has begun to develop the skills to cope with it, much of this as a result of working more closely with the City Planning Department. The adversary relationship that existed at the time of the South Richmond proposal began to change following the proposal's defeat. The City Planning Department began working with the board, seeking its input, and asking it to define priorities for the area. This was significantly helped by the chairman at the time who was interested in getting good planning in the area. As the board

began to discuss the alternatives and consider the issues, it developed a philosophy of good planning principles that it continues to apply as new development occurs. A recent proposal known as Arden Shores sought to develop a piece of property along the shoreline and requested a zone change to higher density. This conflicted with the concept, developed by the board and the City Planning Department, of a scenic district along the shoreline with public access. City Planning staff worked with the developer to meet his needs and those of the existing community. The result, a recommended zone change to the higher density, but with the same number of units as under the original zoning, clustering of units, no landfill, and a public promenade, has met with the board's approval.

This decision of the board, however, has precipitated an outcry from civic groups in the area of the proposed Arden Shores development who feel that the zone change will downgrade the area, and that to make such a decision the board must be "in cahoots" with the City Planning Department. They charge that they were never informed of the development or given an opportunity to express an opinion. As a result, the board has recognized that it can no longer continue to make decisions without input from affected community groups, as it has been doing in the past. It has learned that it must set up a new process to relate more closely to civic associations.

A recent attempt is the establishment of regular community meetings or community contact nights, at which anyone can come and speak on any issue. These are well organized. The speakers are asked to fill out a form noting their particular area of interest, the subject they wish to speak on, the civic organization they represent, if any, and whether or not they have tried to contact city agencies, and what response they received. Each meeting so far has had about fifty people in attendance. One man stated that he had complained to the Borough President and his Congressman about some junk cars he wanted removed. Within one week after appearing at the community contact night, the cars were removed.

The civic organizations most aware of the board's activities have apparently been those with representation on the board. Others in the community have become aware of the board when a "hot issue" was in their area. With some of the newer areas beginning to seek representation on the board, it is expected that the board will become more widely known throughout the area. If the newer community residents seek representation on the board as they have done in Board 3, it can be anticipated that the character of the board will begin to change, and that the board may experience "growing pains" similar to those in Board 3.

At the moment, however, of the thirty board members, 43

percent have lived in the area over twenty years.¹⁸ There is a wide spread in educational backgrounds, with 43 percent having a bachelor's degree or above. Board 4 has the lowest percentage of people in professional occupations--43 percent--with another 23 percent in skilled, service, and office capacities. As in the other boards, the members are very active, many holding officer positions and active in more than one civic group.

Board 4 has a history of strong leadership and a tightly controlled chairmanship, particularly since South Richmond became an issue. The committee structure is well organized and seems to function efficiently. General matters are handled by the executive committee so as not to overload the members. An extremely efficient system has been established for handling matters that come to the board's attention, although a great deal of coordinating seems to fall on the chairman. All matters that are brought to the board receive the following attention: they are logged on an action sheet with an assignment number, date received, date forwarded, and to whom. The committee chairman initials it and date received; he enters the action taken and date. The chairman keeps a record by town of what matters are open and which have been finalized. At the board meeting, he summarizes the actions and presents any matters for a vote, if necessary. The board is therefore always aware of what matters

TABLE 4
 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, BOARD 4

<u>Office</u>	<u>Committee Responsibility</u>
Chairman	
1st Vice-Chairman	Zoning Committee Transportation and Traffic Public Services Health and Hospital
2nd Vice-Chairman	Environmental Protection and Development Parks and Recreation Schools and Education
Secretary	
Treasurer	Capital Budget

are outstanding.

The committee structure resembles that of Board 3, but the board has renamed some of the committees to make them more responsive to local needs. The Police and Fire Committee, for example, was renamed Public Services, to take in such matters as certain utility problems. Sanitation became Environmental Protection and Development to include recent matters such as a proposed garbage island and the liquid natural gas tanks.

Area committees have been established from time to time. One that is functioning currently is Waterfront Watch, a committee chaired by a board member with both non-board and board members on it. It has been responsible for monitoring proposed developments along the shoreline.

The current chairman of Board 4 has been a member of the board since its inception and, like the other chairmen, is very positive about both the accomplishments of her board and its potential. Among her many concerns for the board and the problems it faces are the following: (1) the need to increase communication with the community; (2) the need for less interference from Borough Hall; and (3) the need for increased independence of board operations.

One priority for the board, she feels, is to improve its contact with the community, already begun with regularly scheduled monthly

meetings. She feels an office in the district, or one shared with Board 3, would be a great help in permitting accessibility by the community to the boards, as well as an aid in handling complaints. A staff person hired by the board could log complaints and refer them to the appropriate committee chairman. Without more consistent and structured methods of relating to the people in the district--such as an information center--the board may wind up as "whipping boys" for everyone's complaints. Such a center could provide one means for consolidating and developing community input to head off the kind of confrontation that occurred with Arden Shores. She would recommend hiring a public relations person who would concentrate on developing an educational program for the community.

Both the second and third priorities reflect the need for more independence because of what the chairman perceives is continued interference from Borough Hall, stemming in part from Borough Hall's attempts over the past year to push structural reorganization of the boards. The Consultant to the boards has led a series of Leadership meetings with individual officers to discuss and decide upon the responsibilities of the various board officers, how the board should operate in particular matters, and so forth. The fact that matters were decided by individuals for whole boards without board or executive committee approval is not, she feels, respecting the

freedom of the boards to operate in the manner they feel is best for their particular board, or respecting the structure the board has already established. Since the impetus for these meetings, and for reorganization, have come from Borough Hall and not from the individual chairmen, she feels the interference is unwarranted.

She also feels that Borough Hall is establishing priorities for the boards. One of the major issues confronting Board 4 has been the construction of liquid natural gas tanks on the South Shore. When she asked for \$50 to go to Washington to testify before the Federal Power Commission against the tanks, the request was turned down. Then she was told to release \$50 for the board's Annual Report. Since no board has control over its funds, there is less chance of the funds going towards the board's priorities. As long as the board doesn't control its funds or cannot decide independently how to use them, and is questioned on many expenditures, as she feels is happening, it will be difficult for them to pursue their own goals. The establishment of a district office with staff hired by the board, would eliminate, she feels, this constant conflict with Borough Hall that demands much of her time and energy.

Comparison With the Brooklyn Boards

In spite of the alleged interference from the Borough

President's office, there can be no question but that the Staten Island boards as a whole are much more free from Borough Hall pressure than boards in other boroughs. A crucial factor here seems to be the fact that most of the other Borough Presidents have instituted their own by-laws which define the way they want their boards to run. The fact that the by-laws framed by Borough President Connor were loudly rejected by the Staten Island boards seems to have made a significant difference in this borough. In Brooklyn, for example, the seven community boards are very much tied into the local political structure and are not encouraged to be independent. Since many people come out of the political clubs, board membership is felt to be in large part a patronage appointment. Board members complain that letters do not get mailed, money does not get allocated, attendance is not enforced, they do not get support from Borough Hall, and the Borough President "dallies on board appointments."

Committee structure, unlike the Staten Island boards, is not nearly as expanded or formalized. There is a tendency to form ad hoc committees in response to a particular problem rather than having an ongoing functioning committee structure, and it frequently happens that the whole board gets involved in discussing a matter that should first be handled by a committee. The general direction of the board is towards problem solving rather than initiative.

Representation on the Brooklyn boards tends to be poor both geographically and ethnically, with membership reflecting the dominant ethnic group in the district. This poor geographical representation in conjunction with the board members' accountability aimed towards the Borough President, has resulted in a lack of public visibility and accountability to the communities. In the Capital Budget hearings, for example, civic groups had little input into establishing priorities for their communities. The boards have held few public hearings and, in addition, have poor press coverage.

Recently, however, there has been a beginning of community pressure on the boards for better representation, and an effort at encouraging civic groups to work through the boards, particularly in relation to City Planning.

Much of what is said here about the Brooklyn boards has been said at one time or another about Borough Hall in Staten Island and about the boards themselves. What has seemed to have made a difference in Staten Island, however, is: (1) a recent move towards a more systematic structural organization which is being conducted by the Consultant to the Boards under the direction of Borough Hall; (2) the encouragement by Borough Hall to make the boards more accountable to their communities; (3) the efforts by the board members to increase their expertise in planning matters; and (4) the interest

of board members in getting better service delivery for their district.

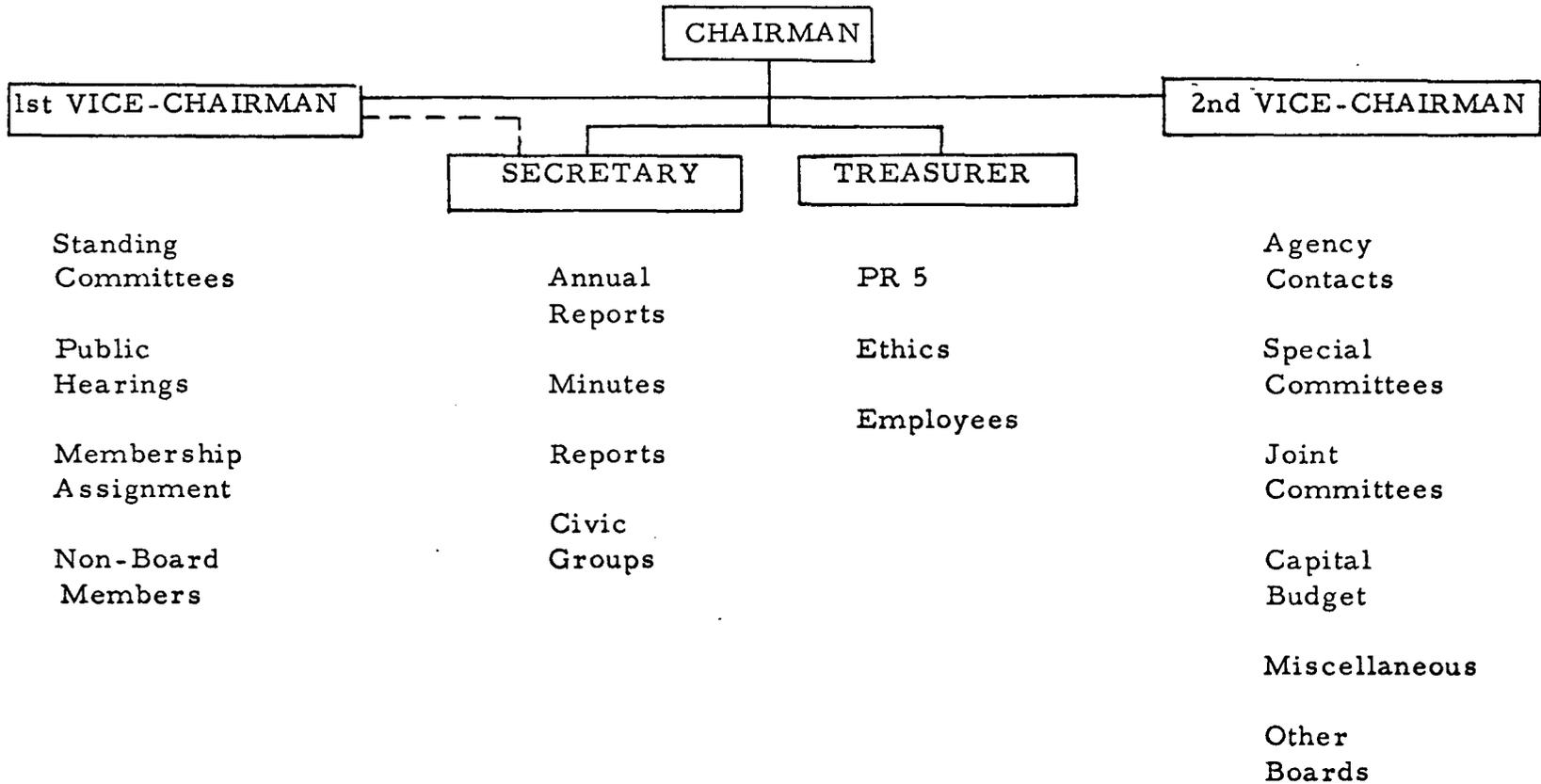
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Reorganization

There has been a strong move by Borough Hall in the last year towards structural reorganization of the four Staten Island boards. Led by the Consultant to the Boards, the meetings have considered Local Law 39 in detail by examining with the various board officers the intent of the law, the duties and responsibilities of the board as a whole and individual members in particular, operating procedures, interagency relations, and so forth. The principal reason given for reorganization is that it is in preparation for and in anticipation of Charter Revision and the decentralization of city services--that the boards may well be an important element in administrative decentralization, and they should be ready for it. By clearly delineating the duties and responsibilities of the individual officers, by making them the same from board to board, and by having each board structured the same way, the officers become accountable and can act as agents of the board. The real function of reorganization and the accompanying move towards increased interagency relations, however, is to develop new constituencies for the boards by expanding

TABLE 5

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART FOR INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY BOARDS
UNDER PROPOSED REORGANIZATION



Source: Consultant to the Community Boards
January 1974

their base beyond the narrow civic association base most of the boards have now. The intent is for the community boards to mesh with Borough Hall in service delivery, particularly with regard to social services. The Borough President, who has been pushing for administrative decentralization on Staten Island for a long time, feels that the Community Boards, as representative of different segments of the island, are the proper vehicles for "outpost listening" on behalf of the Borough President. For the boards to advise the Borough President, however, they must broaden their base constituency.

The process began with a meeting in June of '73 and has continued throughout the year until the present time. These Leadership meetings have involved one set of officers at a time who would discuss their particular role within the context of Local Law 39 and decide how best to carry out that role. The agendas appeared to have originated from Borough Hall. At a first vice-chairman's meeting in January, 1974, for example, the officers discussed quorum requirements, a redesigned membership application, the role of City Councilmen on the boards, and the distribution of calendars. At the secretaries' meeting in February, the agenda included discussion of the distribution of minutes, the purpose and form of minutes, the flow of correspondence (including whether Borough

Hall should open all mail addressed to the board), and a civic census. At a meeting of the second vice-chairmen in March, the discussion focused on relations with operating agencies.

Although these meetings have been taking place for almost a year, it was obvious in some of them that a resistance to reorganization has been building among some of the officers. Some have interpreted the move as an attempt to set up all the boards along the lines of Board 2 which has a well-organized, highly efficient committee structure. The comment was made: "I think you're trying to make us into carbon copies of Board 2." In spite of the recognition of those present at that meeting of the goals of reorganization, the feeling remained that Borough Hall was trying to interfere with the internal operation of the boards. Some questioned the relevance of Board 2's structure to all boards. Some preferred to set up their own structure and make their own assignments on the basis of the task, and to be able to shift a task to another person if so desired.

The Consultant to the boards felt that Borough Hall has not been interfering substantively with the boards' operation but only procedurally, which, he feels, is within its authority. He feels that Borough Hall is merely attempting to create tools, and that it is up to individual boards to decide how to use these tools. Whatever the case, it seems obvious that such a move towards regularizing the

organizational structure of the boards is to both the Borough President's and the community's advantage in the long run because it forces accountability of the officers in particular. Whether the officers were resisting because of increased pressure for accountability, or whether there was a genuine fear that Borough Hall was once again interfering with the operations of the boards is a question that must, for the moment, remain unanswered. Certainly at one meeting of the secretaries, the question was raised about accountability to the community, about fulfilling the intent of one section of Local Law 39 that the boards must use all possible means to communicate to the people of the district. A number of suggestions were made including the formation of a newsletter, sending of minutes, opening of a storefront, and the taking of a civic census to find out the extent of the board's exposure. The suggestion that raised an issue was that of sending out minutes to civic organizations. It was felt that "a little information could be dangerous" and might be misinterpreted, resulting in more harm than good. It was felt that if a citizen wants the minutes, he should come to Borough Hall and get them. A newsletter would be preferred because it would include "selected" information.

There has also been resistance to pressure from Borough Hall to formalize relations with agencies in soft services. Although this,

too, has been resisted and questioned by the boards, representation on various agencies is beginning to take place. The first was Comprehensive Health Planning, and it has a representative from each board. The construction committee of the school board has board representation, and apparently has for some time. The most recent agency liaisons have been with the Human Resources Administration office on Staten Island, which now has board representation, and the Precinct Community Councils which are still soliciting. It is anticipated that Parks and Mental Hygiene will be next. In HRA, for example, the Council that has been established for Staten Island will consist of twenty-six members of various advocacy groups, including Head Start, Family Day Care, Senior Citizens, and the Community Corporation, and will concentrate on developing a master plan for social services, coordinate the HRA agencies on the island, and develop priorities and programs geared to local needs.

Concentration for the present is on soft services where, presumably, there is more chance for cooperation between the boards and the respective agencies. It is apparently from this broad-based constituency that the boards will build a power base, enabling them to approach the super-agencies. Since the Borough President is publicly committed to seeing that these relations take place, he must be likewise building a power base for himself. Whatever the

motivation, it is clear that Boards 1 and 2 are interested in better organizational structure, while Boards 3 and 4 wish to continue operating as they have been. The question may well be asked whether it is really necessary for all boards to be constituted the same way: does each need, for example, a first and second vice-chairman? Where does one draw the line between manipulation of the boards' organization to better serve the interests of the community, and the necessity for a board to operate independently of the Borough President and respond as it sees fit to the needs of its community? Should the boards have "free rein" or free rein "within limits?"

City Planning Workshops

A second distinguishing feature of the Staten Island boards is their interest in extending their expertise in planning and zoning matters. In order to improve the board members' understanding of planning and zoning problems, the local office of City Planning has held a number of training sessions for committee chairmen, board officers, and civic group leaders. Some of these have been borough-wide sessions; others have divided into the north shore and south shore districts. Three workshops, for example, have taken place in the last eighteen months.

Eighteen people attended a training session for south shore residents in January, 1974, and had an opportunity to discuss with planning staff and commission members the purpose of the workshops and the ways in which local boards can relate better to city problems, and in turn, how the city agencies can be more responsive to local needs. Those present had an opportunity to suggest topics for future discussion, and among the suggestions were: community rezoning, community facilities, neighborhood committees, mixed-use zones, and scenic areas.

At the February zoning workshop, twenty-six people from the four boards had an opportunity to review plans for a subsidized housing development. There was also discussion of such community facilities as nursing homes, health-related facilities, and domiciliary-care facilities. This is an important issue because of the large number of such facilities being constructed recently on the island and the strain they put on existing hospital facilities. Since board members consistently receive applications to review, the information provided at the session enabled them to better evaluate the nature of the requests.

The next zoning workshop was attended by fifty-six people and related primarily to the tools available for regulating land use in South Richmond, specifically capital budget, zoning, and mapping.

Towards Better Service Delivery

Another factor that distinguishes the Staten Island boards is their increasing involvement with service delivery. The boards, through their standing and community committees, are receiving an increasing number of complaints on such matters as roadways, sidewalks, sewer problems, flooding conditions. When they in turn contact the agencies responsible for dealing with the particular problem, they frequently meet with no response. There is currently a growing desire by all the boards to "make the most" of the rights granted to them under Local Law 39 by searching for new ways to force agency response. The subpoena power has already been tried, and two others are being considered--requesting defunding of a project, and calling for an injunction. In this way, the boards will be forcing the accountability of other city agencies to their communities, while increasing the accountability of the boards to their constituents.

Comparison of the Boards

In spite of the uniqueness of the four Staten Island community boards, an appraisal of their historical development reveals similarities that provide a basis for comparison. The most significant factors that have led the boards to their present form seem to center

around three concepts: (1) the leadership of the individual board, including the chairman's ability to organize, to understand the decision-making process, and to change; (2) the board's concept of the political process and its ability to work within it; and (3) the interest and demand by individuals and civic organizations within the wider community for participation.

There appears to be a correlation between the ambition and ability of a board's leadership and the quality of the board. In the case of Board 2, after the passage of Local Law 39, the board had two very strong chairmen in a row, both of whom were politically ambitious and who saw the boards as a vehicle for political visibility. Through a variety of methods--principally the Leadership Conference, a well-organized standing committee structure, and the initiation of seven community committees with non-board members--the boards received a credibility unknown before. Board 1, which until recently has had the weakest committee structure of the four boards, is now moving strongly in the direction of a much tighter and responsive committee structure, and the chairman and vice-chairman have initiated eleven new community committees. The commitment by the chairman to a board which is there to serve the community is carried through by this new structure. Both Boards 1 and 2 have created the means for participation by people

beyond the board; both have initiated the structure before it was demanded by civic groups; both boards see "the community" as all residents of the area, and do not assume that the board stands for the residents. They feel that their boards are better able to accomplish changes, get services, and ascertain community priorities with this wide input.

Closely related to the quality of leadership is the board's concept of the political process and its ability to function within it. As official agencies of the City of New York, the boards get involved in "political gamesmanship," negotiate with Borough Hall, and make demands for more independence. Board 2 in its historic battle with Borough Hall over the 1970 by-laws emerged with a self-respect that has enabled it to continue working amicably with Borough Hall. There is an understanding that cooperation is desirable, and that trade-offs are occasionally necessary. In the recent move for reorganization, both Boards 1 and 2 have cooperated with the concept, although Board 1 has not necessarily followed every suggestion. There seems to be, however, a feeling by the boards that reorganization has value, and that one can listen to Borough Hall's plans and then proceed quietly in one's own direction. Since both boards are particularly concerned with increasing the organizational ability and capability of their boards, reorganization has not been perceived as

a threat to their independence.

Whereas Boards 1 and 2 share similar attitudes and approaches with each other in their committee structure, organization, leadership, political concept, and commitment to the wider community, Boards 3 and 4 share attitudes with each other that are much the opposite of the other boards. The strong political ambitions of the chairmen of Board 2 in the early seventies, now appearing in Board 1, have not emerged in these boards to the same extent. The leadership has been good, the committee structure well formed, the accomplishments many, but the boards have operated within a framework unique to their areas. It can be an extreme sensitivity to interference by Borough Hall, a reluctance to play the political game, a desire to operate independently of Borough Hall, difficulty in dealing with changes in the board membership, and the concept of the board as "the community."

Both Boards 3 and 4 are located furthest away from Borough Hall, and both have been inundated in the last ten years with new development and a massive rise in population, although the Board 3 area experienced corresponding "growing pains." Board 3 in particular has been experiencing continuing pressure from new civic groups for representation. The west shore civic associations are very active, very vocal, and politically tied in with some people at

Borough Hall, and have continued to get representation on the board. Their interest in solving problems in their immediate area has led to board meetings that became endlessly tied up with arguing and demands.

The same type of situation is liable to occur soon on Board 4 as new appointments bring in people from some of the newer communities and developments on the South Shore. The chairman was concerned about some new appointments because they were people she did not know, and questioned whether they were being appointed because of their allegiance to Borough Hall. Certainly many of the recent appointments to Board 3 were neighbors or acquaintances of one Borough Hall person. In the case of Board 4, the appointments appear to be broadening the representation of the board rather than any conspiracy against the board, but nonetheless, it can be anticipated that changing the character of the board will again produce the growing pains experienced by Board 3. Since Board 4 has functioned almost like an institution for so many years, with members who have been friends and acquaintances outside of board meetings, the board may experience an upheaval of greater dimensions than Board 3.

Members of both Boards 3 and 4, unlike 1 and 2, have maintained a sense that they speak for the community as representatives of the community, and neither have sought wider community input

beyond public hearings. Board 4 has discovered with the recent Arden Shores controversy that there are segments of the area with no board representation, that the board has not made an effort to contact these civic groups directly and solicit their input in decision making. Their response has been to have community contact nights and to press for an office in South Richmond, but they have made no move towards a community structure with non-board members.

The ad hoc committee structure of both the boards is a direct contrast with the north shore boards of 1 and 2. Whereas the committee structure of Board 2 can absorb any matter that comes before it, Boards 3 and 4 are forced from time to time to establish temporary ad hoc committees to meet the problem. The result is that resources must sometimes be pulled from other sources, thereby weakening the committee structure that exists.

It is the continuing concern with interference from Borough Hall that particularly distinguishes Boards 3 and 4 from those on the north shore. Board 4 has shown its reluctance to participate in the reorganization move by resisting the changes, questioning the reasoning behind it, and refusing to cooperate. Ever since South Richmond, when the city pushed the legislation in opposition to the board, it has been suspicious of Borough Hall's intentions. The members are not willing to play any political game or participate in

trade-offs because they do not trust Borough Hall. A recent example occurred during the Leadership meetings, during which the matter was raised of whether Borough Hall coordinators should open the board's mail. The chairman of Board 4 questioned the procedure because of problems in the past. Although her concern seemed unwarranted at the time, there was a time that Borough Hall interfered considerably with the mail, and it may be that her questioning reflected this.

At one time, an outgoing chairman from one of the boards charged that Borough Hall doctored certain letters, revised minutes of board meetings, permitted too much involvement in substantive debate by the coordinators, and interfered with mail to the boards by holding it up or "losing it." At the time, if a letter to an agency was found inappropriate or insulting, it would never get sent, although the board chairman would get a copy as if it had. If the board was pushing for something not to the liking of someone in Borough Hall, the matter would be delayed or perhaps never acted upon. Although there has been no specific documentation of such occurrences recently, the fact that the coordinators are hired by the Borough President and see most correspondence before board members do, makes a chairman's concern understandable.

This continuing conflict between the chairman of Board 4 and

Borough Hall can be expected to continue until a major issue arises in which the board attempts to force Borough Hall to back down. This occurred one time on Board 2 when it opposed the by-laws. At the time two members were removed from the board, but the outcome was a mutual respect between the board and Borough Hall. Such a thing has yet to occur with 4, and it may not if the Borough President fails to reappoint the current chairman to another term as board member, since she has been the prime mover for independence. It will come as no surprise if she is dropped from the board.

A similar confrontation is brewing now on Board 3 between the chairman and the Borough President. The Borough President has been aware since last year of the overrepresentation of the west shore and the high percentage of city employees on the board (the law calls for a limit of 25 percent). He was very much aware that the representation was not within the intent of Local Law 39 and was damaging the ability of the board to function as a unit. He was also very much aware that the number of city employees was close to 25 percent. In spite of this, the two most recent appointments to the board, occurring in April 1974, were both from the west shore, and one is a city employee. Hence, the question: is the appointment of these people an affront to the boards, or are they the result of promises made previously to these people? In either case, it is an

affront, although not necessarily an intentional one. Board 3 is very likely heading for a major confrontation with the Borough President over these two appointments.

Implications of the Differences

In the absence of any one structure defined by Local Law 39 for the boards, it would be incorrect to assume that only such a structure as that of Board 2 is appropriate for all the boards. The boards are evolving creatures, changing as demands are put upon them, and functioning within the interests and capabilities of the members. A structure that works for Board 2 may be inappropriate for the changing character of the communities of the South Shore. A community committee structure may be self-perpetuating when an area is continuously faced with new issues but may become stagnant when no pressing issues are before the community. People seldom participate for the sake of participating. They want access to those responsible when an issue is before them; otherwise they are content to concentrate on other things. The Structure of Board 2 is unique in that it can absorb anything that comes before the board, and up until now there have continued to be issues. But it is perhaps better to let some of this evolve instead of planting a structure in every board.

What reorganization suggests for the boards is a structure akin to that in business, where the emphasis is on results and on the achievement of particular goals, rather than on the intention of meeting those goals. The emphasis appears to be on accountability of the members to the community. Unlike the bureaucratic agencies of the city that already exist, where accountability is obscured and the perpetuation of the agency is on the basis of its good intentions, the community boards are encouraged to operate in a way foreign to many city agencies. They are encouraged to become less like public service institutions and more like private business.

Since so much of the effectiveness of the boards, in terms of their ability to force agency response, get service delivery, make credible zoning and planning decisions, set realistic priorities for their communities, and consolidate public opinion, has been due to the leadership ability of their chairmen and officers, it is important for the boards to be able to function well in the absence of this quality. In an article on the failure of public service institutions to achieve a high level of performance, Drucker notes that the institution's claim that the lack of "better people" is a false reason for failure:

If service institutions cannot be run and managed by men of normal or even fairly low endowment, if, in other words, we cannot organize the task so that it will be done on a satisfactory

level by men who only try hard, it cannot be done at all.¹⁹

Thus, the need for structural reorganization is there, but is it realistic to assume that a set of officially appointed unpaid volunteers will be ready and willing to function within a bureaucratic-type formalized structure? Or is this perhaps too harsh a judgment? Board 2 found that its community committee structure slid after its politically ambitious chairman left, and yet the structure remained enough intact to be picked up again by new people.

One of the main implications of the differences is that if the boards are truly representative of their communities, they will initiate a structure responsive to the needs of the communities. Whereas impetus for community committees came from the board in Boards 1 and 2, the impetus on 3 and 4 is coming from the community. The boards will respond as they are forced to respond, and it is perhaps presumptuous of Borough Hall to assume the initiative. It would seem from Local Law 39 that the writers of the legislation anticipated that individual boards would experiment with a structure best suited to their area. The legislation provides for non-board members in anticipation of community committees, but left this to the discretion of the individual boards.

It would seem from a comparison of the four boards that, ideally, the role of the Borough President should be to see that the

boards get the best representation--geographic, income, ethnic, civic group--in the districts; that the most qualified people become members with appropriate training sessions to assure their ability to function effectively; and that members fulfill their obligation to attend meetings and be removed if necessary for lack of interest and involvement. Beyond that, the Borough President should have no control, since Local Law 39 does not authorize involvement in substantive matters of the boards. Whether such a separation between appointment power and control over substantive matters is possible is questionable. In any case, the boards' increasing involvement in both planning and service functions in their districts appears to be generating increasing opportunity for conflict with Borough Hall.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS

The most comprehensive document to date that discusses the community boards is the report soon to be released by the Charter Revision Commission. The report had two objectives: (1) to analyze the nature and effectiveness of the community boards, focusing on the role and significance of existing boards, and their degree of success in meeting the Charter Commission's objectives; and (2) to evaluate community boards in relation to a decentralized system of government for New York City, including the consideration of the boards as either the primary citizen participation component of any decentralized units of government.¹

The report envisages four possible alternative roles of the community boards under decentralization.² The first plan involves the boards in a decision-making role in first-instance planning decisions, and includes review of allocations of central service agencies, establishing priorities for capital projects, monitoring the performance of service agencies, operating citizen information and grievance centers, and working with a service cabinet of district agency chiefs

to develop new inter-agency programs.

In the second alternative, decision-making power for planning, budgeting and the operation of services would be devolved to the boroughs. The community boards would continue but with expanded advisory and review powers for planning, service delivery and expense and capital budget preparation, but would have a Community Administrator who would head a District Service Cabinet.

A third alternative would involve establishing new local councils in place of community boards. These would be on the district level and would have administrative responsibility for service functions as well as budget, planning, and personnel. This type of council could be formed under a fourth alternative in which the boards could continue as citizen advocacy and advisory bodies under the jurisdiction of the council. The report recognizes, however, the competition that might develop between the boards and the council under this fourth approach.

All of the alternatives allow for a decentralization of services and some decision making on the local level, but only the first alternative considers retention of the boards in a real decision-making capacity. None of the alternatives insure achievement of the three objectives for structural reform of city government, that is, genuine citizen participation, responsive local government, and effective

local self-government. The fallacy lies in assuming that decentralizing services will result in a more efficient and effective government, when in effect the real question is how to force accountability of city agencies. There is implicit in the report the assumption that adding another layer of bureaucracy in an administratively rather than a politically decentralized structure, without devolving real decision-making powers, will result in responsive government.

The report also sidesteps the matter of "genuine citizen participation."

For some people, the ability to have their views added to the variety of considerations which go into the making of a decision is of prime importance. Others believe that citizen involvement at some point with city agencies is important if government is to be responsive to the needs of communities . . . the real issue may be whether (citizen involvement groups) . . . can be formally involved in government and whether such participation is positive and productive. It seems fair to conclude that Community Boards have made some contributions to increased citizen involvement in municipal government, but are by no means models for "genuine citizen participation."³

There is no attempt in the report to deal with this very critical issue--that is, to recognize the fact that genuine citizen participation means a redistribution of power to enable citizens to share in decision making with professional bureaucrats and elected officials. Instead, the report has defined citizen participation as "an ability of citizens to have some formal role in municipal decision making or to become directly involved with municipal institutions."⁴ With a

definition as broad as this one, the board members' roles as they currently exist would suffice.

This same attitude is reflected in the report, "Restructuring the Government of New York City," which preceded the formation of the Charter Revision Commission.⁵ The report notes that the citizen performs three significant governmental roles. In one role, as a voter, the citizen is the source of all governmental power; in the second, he is the recipient of government services; in the third role, he is a governing force himself, "ideally exercising some degree of quasi-governmental responsibility around him in his community." In other words, he is a voter, a citizen, and an officially appointed representative. The report concludes that it is this last role that describes the nature of the community boards, that they are bodies designed to give citizens an opportunity to act in an official capacity as citizens. Because of this last role which the report considers vitally important, the voter is placed at the top of the decision-making hierarchy:

In our view, a critical element in any effective reorganization of the City's structure is the recognition that there is a far more important role to be played by the citizen.⁶

After lengthy discussion of a proposal for restructuring the government of the city, the report focuses on what this "important role" is to be.

People must have a sense of belonging, of identity with a community, of roots in a place . . . Participation involves, in addition to voting, the capability of going to hearings, joining boards, having somebody close to home to whom you can complain and make suggestions--and who has the power and ability to do what is needed.⁷

The implication is obvious. It is not the citizens who are to have the "power and ability to do what is needed" but rather the people they elect. This elitist approach serves only to help perpetuate an illusion that pervades thinking today. The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Affairs has noted:

It has become something of a fad to have a decentralized program--or at least to talk about decentralization . . . Unfortunately, much of the talk and writing includes vague generalizations, misconceptions and propositions that are only partly thought out.⁸

The Commission feels that this situation reflects the failure of scholars and practitioners to develop systematic, empirically-based methods for designing and evaluating governmental organizations.⁹ In modifying bureaucratic decision-making, it notes, the distinctions between decentralization as a structural-professional concept and citizen participation as a nonstructural-nonprofessional concept have become blurred and are no longer either-or propositions. Neighborhood government and metropolitan government, for example, are not mutually exclusive ideas.

It is to the credit of the Charter Revision Commission's report

that it is aware of the need to maintain a strong centralized structure while simultaneously working to attain an effective local government. It fails, however, to consider the potential problems that may be created by significantly increasing the power and responsibility of the community boards if the boards take some power from the centralized structure. There is little or no consideration of the interplay of power and the perceived need by agencies to guard their domain. The report errs in other ways: it assumes service delivery will be better at a local level, and ignores the question of accountability.

Another failure of the report is the continual blurring of the concept of citizen participation, i. e., who is participating and how and why. Sometimes the participants are board members, sometimes civic groups, sometimes unorganized citizens. The report substitutes the objective of "genuine citizen participation" with decision-making responsibility of a much more limited nature. It does not recognize that the success of the boards as a vehicle for participation is a subjective one, largely dependent on "where one sits." Any study of the boards should reflect the interaction between the individual board members and the various people and agencies they deal with. In a study of citizen participation, it is important to be aware of the concepts those outside the boards hold about the

board members and who they represent.

No board members, for example, are "just citizens." They bring with them identification with civic groups, business interests, cultural concerns, neighborhood loyalties. When they are appointed to a community board, do they then become "the community" in the eyes of city agencies or are they merely representatives of "the community?" If they have come to the board primarily because of their activities in local civic groups, and are considered by these groups as their spokesmen, do their loyalties lie with that community?

It has been suggested that the board member must wear two hats. He must be representative of narrower community interests while at the same time able to incorporate community values, needs and interests with the broader needs of the district and the borough. In doing so, he becomes a buffer between governmental services and agencies, and area residents. This role was the basic intent of Local Law 39, rather than participation per se. It was to create a vehicle that would bridge the gap between government and private citizens--an information device, a beginning in better service delivery, and also an opportunity for citizens to become involved in the needs of their area. In becoming involved, however, the citizens became the objective of a variety of strategies by others based on

corresponding concepts of community and participation.

Strategies of Participants

When one speaks of the boards as a vehicle for participation, it is necessary to realize that two forms of citizen participation are meant: one, that the board members themselves are citizen participants; and two, that they, in turn, relate to a wider constituency which constitutes participants also. They perform this function within administrative decentralization, which, in itself, severely limits the amount of decision-making which can take place in any governmental or quasi-governmental agency. To talk about genuine participation is to talk of community control within the context of political decentralization. How far into real participation the boards should go depends upon whose interests the boards are meant to serve.

The boards, as presently construed, are handled administratively through the Borough President's office. Because of this and because the impetus for their creation has come primarily from government, they have been set up to serve those interests. Burke notes:

. . . the most troublesome area of all is the choice of strategy objectives for citizen participation. . . citizen participation is often predicated less upon value premises than upon practical considerations. This is what makes it acceptable . . . citizens

can be used as instruments for the attainment of specific ends.¹⁰

What results is a citizen's advisory body almost totally lacking in decision-making authority that is comprised of a coalition of hand-picked worthy citizens representing significant interests in the community. The basic method is cooptation or placation in which they advise, while the powerholders retain the right to judge the credibility and feasibility of the advice. Burke's "formal version" of cooptation would seem applicable here, i. e., where the consent of the citizenry at large is won by absorbing groups which reflect the sentiments of the community. Although this concept of the boards has changed recently, the strategies used by city agencies, developers, the Borough President's office, civic groups, community groups, and individual residents, as they interact with the board, reflect this orientation.

Although all city agencies are supposed to cooperate with the community boards, the only one to work consistently with them is the City Planning Department. As noted earlier, a concerted effort has been made by the department to schedule training sessions for board members in zoning and planning matters. A member of its staff has been appointed to each board as liaison and subsequent two-way reporting, reports are made before the boards and civic groups as well as in committees, and zoning and planning handbooks have been

provided to board members. The reason for this working relationship cannot be laid solely to the sharing of certain planning functions. The more probable reasons are that the Planning Department has realized that: (1) some meritorious proposals have not been approved because of community opposition, largely due to lack of community understanding and non-involvement in the decision-making process; and (2) the advisory nature of the City Planning Department and the need to develop a constituency in the community boards.

The most obvious example of the first reason is the South Richmond case, in which the City Planning Department was interested in having legislation adopted which would create a public benefit corporation to develop 10,000 acres of land on the South Shore. Although much of the land was vacant and in city ownership, a sizable portion was in private ownership and would have been subject to condemnation under the bill. In concluding that the project was economically feasible, a report raised a number of questions among Islanders concerning the proposed landfill in connection with the project, the future of existing communities, condemnation of private property, controls over the corporation, the overall plan for the area, and the future of large tracts of existing park land. In short, South Richmond residents were suddenly faced with the possibility of being evacuated from the area, their homes condemned and older

communities destroyed, an influx of up to 450,000 new people within the next twenty years, and all the time being told that it was in their best interest--that the alternatives were worse.

The residents of the area and Community Board 4, however, felt that the alternative of doing nothing was preferable and strongly opposed the bill. The result was that the legislation never made it out of committee in Albany. Board 4 felt totally alienated from the city and from the City Planning Department. As time passed, however, the department revived the issue with the community board and suggested that the two of them work towards developing reasonable developmental tools for the area. Community Board 4 thus became a partner with the City Planning Department in defining the priorities and developing strategies for implementation. The planning department had to be content with achieving less than was felt necessary for the area but more than could be achieved without the cooperation of the community board. Board 4, in conjunction with the City Planning Department, presented a new plan to officers of twenty to thirty of the area's civic associations, and then later to the general public. There was throughout a positive working relationship that will hopefully result in benefits for South Richmond.

There is, unquestionably, the sense that the City Planning Department regards the board members as "the community," and

expects the board and its committees to relate to individual civic groups and residents in the majority of cases and consolidate sentiment, form an opinion, and relay this to the planning department. When board members have questioned themselves about relating to their wider community, but did not perceive just who this wider community would involve, the planning department staff suggested that the members respond to those people they perceived to be their community. Since it is impossible for the department to relate to every individual resident, civic groups have been encouraged to organize and use the boards as their spokesmen.

One problem with this approach is the fact that unorganized, non-vocal segments of the district must, in order to translate or transmit their ideas to the planning department, tie in with an existing civic organization, or set about organizing a group of their own, especially if their area does not have board representation. If the boards are encouraged by this to relate to organized groups rather than individuals, the decision-making process may become distorted.

A second group of people which relates to the board are developers. An increasing number are coming before the boards prior to formal submission of plans to various city departments for approval. In some cases, a developer may be attempting to ascertain community sentiment for something that does not affect the area

directly, but he hopes that the input of the board may be advantageous at a later time. A recent example of this is "Recap Island," a garbage island proposed for construction about two miles off the east shore of Staten Island. The developer, in speaking before Community Board 4, said that since the proposed island could be seen from the shore and since it would involve garbage disposal, he wanted to bring the idea to the boards early to allow room for any kind of input from board members. He emphasized that he only wanted to build this island with the communities' cooperation, and by coming early, any part of the proposal could be changed. In making his presentation, he made it sound as if the approval of Staten Island citizens was almost as important as city, state and federal approval.

As it turns out, this may be true. On April 11, 1974, an article on Recap Island appeared in the Staten Island Advance, in which it states that the proposal now before the State Assembly has received "overwhelmingly negative" response from Staten Island lawmakers. All three assemblymen have said they will oppose the bill:

State Sen. John J. Marchi said that he has asked the four community boards and Waterfront Watch, a citizens lobbying group, for their opinions of the proposal. "Until I hear something from these groups in support of this bill," Marchi said yesterday, "it will not move in the Senate, regardless of what happens in the Assembly."¹¹

Can it be that Jerome Kretchmer, the moving force behind the bill, anticipated this opposition, and used community board support as a strategy in gaining acceptance of the bill? At least two of the four boards informally expressed favorable comments about the development proposal when it was presented to their boards or relevant committees, and encouraged Kretchmer to pursue the idea, although no vote as such was taken. However, opposition emerged several weeks later from at least one board, and nothing further has been done about formally submitting the bill in Albany.

The board members should have no illusions about the intent of most developers who come before the boards, even when the proposal is couched in terms such as: need for citizen input, the importance of having the development acceptable to the community, and so forth. In this case, the developer was seeking legislative support for a development that was likely to have opposition.

In other cases, the developer hopes to head off community opposition that could lower the chances for approval if a zone change or variance is involved. There is no question but that this has been a successful strategy for developers, and one which in turn has benefitted the communities. Although there are countless examples of this, a fairly recent one is a residential and commercial development proposal for land presently zoned residential. The developer

needs no zone change and can proceed with rather typical Staten Island development (grid-iron street pattern with look-alike houses set on small lots), since the streets are already mapped and allow little flexibility in housing design. In addition, the street mapping would result in a number of curb cuts on two major arteries that bound the property. He would like planned unit development, thus allowing for redesign of the streets, but wishes to put in some commercial space, thereby necessitating a zone change. Brought first to the City Planning Department, the proposal has been before the Richmond Avenue Task Force of Board 3 for its consideration and suggestions. It was just submitted formally for board approval.

Although developers frequently submit their proposal first to the board and its committees, and then at a public hearing run by the committee(s), they tend to see the board as the community and as representative of the community. They must come before the board if the proposal involves a zone change or variance. They are encouraged by the City Planning Department to have the board review the plan even when no change or variance is involved, in order to reduce any opposition if some is expected. The effect is to coopt board members into acceptance of the project. There are also occasional implied threats by developers to get board acceptance. In the two recent combined residential and commercial proposals for

Richmond Avenue and Victory Boulevard, both properties necessitated a zone change for commercial to be built on the property, presently zoned residential. If the developers get commercial zoning, they agree to develop the remainder of the property as a planned unit development. If not, they will build "by right" and put in typical housing that will result in a number of curb cuts on the major routes, thereby seriously interrupting the traffic flow. The planning department favors the proposals because they will result, it feels, in better development.

What the board has been told, in effect, is that either it accepts the developments as proposed, or with minor modifications, or the community will get all housing with a number of curb cuts. Either the community accepts 200,000 square feet of additional commercial space, or development by right. By getting board approval prior to a public hearing (although tentative), by facing questions from the board prior to such a hearing, by anticipating opposition from the wider community, the developers recognize that the board's opinion counts, even if only advisory. At the same time, however, they make it very difficult for the board to oppose the project in its entirety. At some point, the board members will begin to realize that they will continue to be used in this fashion unless they take a stand. There is a strong need for the board to initiate an overall development

strategy for the area in order to provide a basis for consideration of individual proposals.

Community groups have their strategies as well in approaching the boards. A favorite approach is to stress the use of their facilities for Staten Islanders rather than "the people from Brooklyn." Many representatives have been appearing at board meetings to get approval of their plans for such community facilities as nursing homes, senior citizen facilities, and halfway houses. They understand the board members' weakness for "providing for their own" and their reluctance in accepting development which will attract more people from outside the borough. Other community groups are seeking liaison with the community boards, such as the Precinct Community Council which would like to have a representative from the boards at their meetings, and HRA's Department of Community Development which wishes to establish an advocacy constituency organization of representatives from Head Start, Senior Citizens, the handicapped, exceptional children, community corporation, as well as a representative from each community board. In addition they would like to see individual boards establish a social service committee. That this would enhance the authority of these organizations to have community board representatives on them is undoubtedly true, but it raises a serious question of how

such representation fits in with the boards' role. Just how many representatives can each board provide, and if this is justified, then how many other organizations need board representation too? If the boards are to become further involved in service delivery in their areas, there will have to be inter-agency communication, but this is not to say that board members will be able to spread themselves so thin as to be immediately involved in everything that goes on in their areas.

If the boards are subjected to the strategies of city agencies, developers, and community groups, they are even more open to the pressures, however subtle, from Borough Hall. Some requests from the Borough President are given consideration and then rejected because, on the face of it, they do not have immediate relevance to the boards. What the board members are not aware of is the fact that the requests are strategies of the Borough President that mask something else, and he is using the boards as means to some other end.

Recently, for example, the Borough President spoke with the chairmen of all four boards and brought to their attention that the Councilmen were not attending board meetings at all, but that in some cases their representatives were instructed to come in their place. This the Borough President found entirely unacceptable,

both the Councilmen's absence and the appointment of representatives. He strongly urged the chairmen to insist that the Councilmen attend, as they do in other boroughs. Unfortunately for the Borough President, none of the chairmen felt strongly one way or the other about the issue, and in some cases felt it was one less problem for the board. They failed to see that the Borough President was using this strategy to "get back" at one Councilman for something else by publicly exposing his supposed "negligence" of the boards.

There is no question but that the Borough President is in an awkward position with regard to the boards, and the above is not meant as a criticism of his relationship with them. He has said many times that he would prefer not to be involved in the appointment of board members. He has also implied that the boards should operate independently of Borough Hall and has stated his willingness to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities. But, nonetheless, the fact that he appoints the members means that he cannot free himself from accountability for the boards' actions. When a problem arises, he must develop a solution; he must take the "flak" from constituents and politicians when the boards make decisions that antagonize them. It is this inevitable involvement with the boards under the present appointive system that most limits the independence of the boards.

Any discussion of participants is incomplete without reference to unorganized individual residents and organized civic groups, both of whom see themselves as "the community." They see the boards as their representatives and their spokesmen, and as such they expect the boards to follow their recommendations and do what is best for the immediate area residents. Where they have a civic group representative on a board, as is usually the case, they expect him to vote in accordance with the civic group's wishes. When he does not, or when the board votes against the civic group's wishes, they fail to understand the reasoning behind the board's point of view. They ask: why did the board solicit our opinion if they didn't take it into consideration? Or, why did we bother to make our views known if they were going to vote for it anyway?

This kind of thinking and the pressure residents bring to bear on individual board members raises the critical issue of who it is that board members represent. It is often heard at board meetings that "the community wants this" or "the community said that," but under questioning it becomes obvious that each board member has his own conception of community, and therefore, of which people should participate in the decision-making process. If a zone change is involved, the community might mean the residents within 400 feet of the property line; or the community might mean the most vocal

civic group in the area; or it could be the people who showed up at a public hearing; or it might just be a few people whom the board member knows and who have given him the benefit of their opinion. The boards in general do not seem to have strict guidelines of just who should be involved in the decision-making process. They tend, however, to contact civic groups, religious organizations, and community groups when they want "community input," and where none exist, they go to the PTA. There are obvious limitations to this method, particularly the possibility of excluding a large unorganized element in the neighborhoods.

The kind of community or civic group pressure that is brought to bear on board members raises several questions: do the decisions reflect their civic groups or rather wider community needs; are they in the interest of the needs of the immediate neighborhood, or in the interest of good planning principles? If the board member has a special interest in the matter at hand, such as some relationship to his business, how does this influence his decision?

At a recent zoning committee meeting of Board 3, where a proposal for a zone change to allow Toyota to expand its new car facilities to a neighboring piece of property was again up for consideration after previously having been turned down, one board member was well aware of his civic group's continued strong opposition

to the change. Since last submitted, the proposal had had a number of changes more compatible with the residences in the area, and this member felt the project was now acceptable. In the voting, however, he abstained in order to avoid the civic group's criticism which he anticipated if he voted for the project.

This raises a basic question of board members' accountability. To whom are they accountable? On the one hand, they are appointed by the Borough President to, among other things, advise him on matters of importance in the district. They are also dependent upon him for reappointment. On the other hand, they are charged with communicating with the people of their district; they usually belong to civic associations; the civic groups consider them representative of their interests; and they consider themselves representative of these interests. As long as the appointment procedure exists, this paradoxical situation may be incapable of resolution. Certainly recent efforts by the boards to pursue a course more independent of Borough Hall have met with resistance.

Conflict With Borough Hall

The last year has witnessed an increasing movement by some of the boards towards more independent operation combined with increasing resistance to interference by Borough Hall. With the

increased budget appropriation available, they are moving towards hiring of their own staff for some of their work. Board 1 has just hired a stenographer for not only their regular monthly meeting, but to handle some other matters for the board.

This has occurred simultaneously with the move towards re-organization initiated by Borough Hall, ostensibly to make the boards a more independent and efficient body and fix accountability. Whether the Borough President is really anxious to have a completely independent community board structure is questionable, however. The basic problem is whether the Borough President can give the boards independence and, at the same time, be willing to withstand criticism and "static" from the boards. More explicit, perhaps, is the problem of creating boards that can, in effect, go "against the system" that created them.

Recent observation of leadership meetings involving officers of the boards has revealed enough evidence to support the conclusion that the boards are heading for trouble by pursuing their independence beyond that "granted" by the Borough President's office. A major issue has been the unavailability until recently of budgeted funds to the boards. Approximately half of the budgeted funds for 1973-74 from each board are to pay for secretarial help hired by the Borough President and stationed at Borough Hall. The

secretaries, known as the PR 5 girls, attended regular evening meetings of the boards and took minutes. At one point, however, the Consultant to the boards recommended that the board coordinators in conjunction with the board secretaries handle the minutes, since the secretaries would no longer be available. The boards were adamant that they continue to receive this help, and continued to push Borough Hall in meeting after meeting for stenographic services. If they had had their own funds available to hire help, there would not have been a problem. But because the funds had been withheld, they were being forced to compromise under the guise that, with reorganization, the suggested record-taking would be suitable.

The boards refused. They wanted stenographic help for evening meetings, and they wanted their funds, and they continued to pressure Borough Hall to produce their budget allocations. This kind of static began to bother Borough Hall; it resented having given the boards some degree of freedom only to receive static in return. At one meeting the members were warned that either they "lay off the pressure" on the Borough President or "they would be back where they started." This comment was in reference to the early seventies when the boards were watched much more carefully and monitored by Borough Hall. The implication was that the boards have, with the help of Borough Hall, developed a strong working relationship with the City Planning

Department, which it is encouraging to happen with other city agencies, but that the boards' actions should not become an embarrassment to Borough Hall.

Following the meeting at which this "threat" was made, the matter was again brought up at another leadership meeting, chaired by the Consultant to the boards who has been conducting the leadership meetings. In an attempt to get a motion on the floor concerning the fact that Borough Hall should supply the boards with stenographic help, the officers were asked by the Consultant to have the motion stricken from the record. What followed was a verbal battle between the Consultant and the board officers present that reflected the officers' desire to have their concerns recorded, and the Consultant's desire "not to make waves." Underlying the comments was the feeling that the Consultant "had something up his sleeve" and was asking them to trust him when they really could not. The eventual result of the meeting was that the conversation shifted to guidelines for taking minutes, and the matter of funds available for PR 5 girls was never resolved at the meeting. Several weeks later, however, funding became available from the Bureau of the Budget.

Some of this could have been avoided if the boards dealt directly with the Bureau of the Budget and the Comptroller's office rather than through Borough Hall. It is because these agencies

refuse to recognize the legal status of the boards that the Borough President becomes involved to the extent that he has in the matter of the boards' budget.

The leadership meetings which have been involved for the past year with slated reorganization of the structural aspects of the boards have been the source of much subtle pressure on the boards from Borough Hall to conform to what it thinks the boards should be rather than what they want to be. It is not always obvious what the Consultant is trying to achieve as the Borough President's spokesman in these meetings. He has pushed inter-agency communication under the guise of being more responsive to the community, and now the boards have representatives on HRA and the Police Precinct Community Council. The eventual plan is to have each board with an inter-agency committee under the 2nd vice-president, but none have accomplished this as yet. Pressure was put on the secretaries at one leadership meeting to drop the practice of having the chairmen sign all letters sent out from the boards. Apparently two lawsuits are currently pending as a result of letters being sent that gave incorrect or misleading impressions of board sentiment. The secretaries refused to recognize this as a problem and felt that it could be resolved by education and by the chairmen being more cautious about what they sign. One could well ask, however, what

the motives of the Consultant are that prompt these decisions for the boards, rather than the initiative coming from the board members themselves.

The whole move towards reorganization of the Staten Island boards is reminiscent of a technique to create a non-conflict producing middle-class structure modeled after the Office of Neighborhood Government (ONG). Through this Office, which is part of the Mayor's office, a District Manager experiment was introduced to put greater power in the hands of administrative officials in the field, and to better coordinate the local operations of various independent and unrelated city departments.¹² The experiment in each experimental Community Planning District was carried out by appointing a new official, a District Manager, who was to be responsible for coordinating service delivery functions in the district. In addition, there is a District Service Cabinet under him composed of representatives of each of the city administrations (including Environmental Protection, Housing and Development, Human Resources, Health Services, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, Transportation, and the Police Department) which affected the community board district or required coordination with programs operated within the district. The basic approach is towards establishing "local communities of officials who would be able to intervene with

the bureaucracy on behalf of individual clients."¹³

Our priority in this program is to provide an integrated agency structure at the district level to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of city services in meeting community needs. Without this administrative decentralization, it will be impossible to have both meaningful and realistic citizen participation in city government.¹⁴

Although this statement by Mayor Lindsay in 1971 stressed service delivery and reduced citizen alienation, other writers have felt that the real purpose of the program was to limit and contain community involvement. In an unpublished report, "Evaluation of Community Participation in the ONG Experiment," Marilyn Gittell hypothesizes that the choice of neighborhoods for the ONG experiment was deliberate--that areas with well-established community organizations were chosen so as to guarantee support for the District Manager's efforts and limit conflict.¹⁵ She submits the following rationale to support her contention that the success of the ONG program may have been predetermined:¹⁶ districts were chosen with limited demands and sound, well-established civic organizations; regular citizens had lack of information about and access to ONG: there was heavy reliance on community leaders to placate and manipulate community demands; there was minimal response to demands for service delivery; and political conflict was avoided.

Most of the areas chosen for the ONG experiment were not only well-organized but middle-income. Where a low-income or transitional area was chosen, it was less organized, so as to not become a target for these groups. The middle-income character of a community reflects a consistent pattern of participation:

Citizens of higher social and economic status participate more in politics. This generalization has been confirmed many times in many nations. And it generally holds true whether one uses level of education, income or occupation as the measure of social status.¹⁷

The middle-class is said to be more knowledgeable about formal institutions and appropriate political channels for voicing demands, and a study by Nie and Verba concludes that community participation does influence decision making where it exists.¹⁸ The lower income community, by contrast, tends to be less organized locally with demands limited more to basic essentials. Community organization tends to be ad hoc and crisis oriented, with strategies less frequently related to formal political channels or long-range solutions.

There is a great deal of similarity between the attempt to structure the ONG experimental districts and the recent move for reorganization by Borough Hall on Staten Island. Staten Island is a middle-class community with a well-organized, active set of civic organizations. The community boards are being encouraged to

relate to these organizations and to the districts much the same way as the ONG experimental districts, and for the same reasons. The boards are encouraged to develop these civic groups as their constituency, to become involved in service delivery, to develop inter-agency contacts. The methods may vary, but the goals are the same. The attempt is to basically structure all four boards on the Board 2 model, with its well-developed functional and community committee structure. However, the integrated, flexible structure of Board 2 that has existed prior to reorganization may be negated by the level of bureaucratic technicalities that begin to smother the board. The reorganization attempt, like the choice of experimental districts for ONG, may well be a move to "groom" the boards for success in anticipation of decentralization.

Two problems emerge, however, from such a move. The first is the question of accountability, in that accountability does not shift to the community as long as the appointment process is in effect. The myth of participation is still a myth as long as the boards remain part of administrative decentralization as essentially official governmental agencies.

The second problem to emerge from reorganization is the growing conflict with Borough Hall and the issue of independence from Borough Hall interference. There is once again a myth--the

myth that reorganization will foster independence of the boards. What the boards have discovered, however, is that any attempt on their part to resist reorganization is interpreted as lack of cooperation, stubbornness, inadequacy, stupidity, rather than the acceptance that such a move is not authorized by Local Law 39 and is well beyond the legal authority of the Borough President. Board 4 has resisted the reorganization drive most strongly and has structured its board responsibilities differently according to the perceived needs of the district and the interests of the board members. The urge to continue doing things "its way" may threaten Borough Hall to the point of subtle retaliation. Indeed, it can be heard (or whispered) that the boards will "return to their former primitive state" if they are not careful. The concerns are echoes of the controversies raised by school decentralization in New York:

Clearly, the ONG experiment was a narrow form of administrative decentralization. It represents a set of goals that seemed to be within the range of political feasibility at the time. . . . The essential variable . . . behind the above set of goals and the inherent limitation of citizen participation within the ONG structure is the very strong political threat posed by the city's experience of controversy with the issue of school decentralization and the threat of decentralization to particular sets of civil service workers such as police and sanitation and their unions.¹⁹

School decentralization sparked a controversy in New York City that continues today and that has application to the community

board structure. Decentralization of the schools grew out of an educational mandate from the New York State Legislature in 1967 to decentralize city schools in the name of community participation.²⁰ Mayor Lindsay's Advisory Panel on Decentralization formulated a plan commonly known as the Bundy Report, which recommended formation of thirty-three to sixty-five school districts managed by elected school boards with powers over budget, curriculum and personnel.

The Bundy Report galvanized the opposition of the professional groups, such as the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) which was fearful of the implications of public accountability and revisions of the intricate civil service system.²¹

Marilyn Gittell notes in her study of decentralization in the schools that analysts and evaluators of the program rejected the demonstration districts "solely because they conflicted with the established source of power in the city."²² Citizen participation was also blamed for the fact that accepted practices in the school districts were confronted by the elected school board members. She notes further:

This confrontation with a central institution to force a redistribution of power is viewed by many analysts of decentralization as one of its great negatives; for others it represents a part of a necessary process.²³

Moynihan reaches the same conclusions in his discussion of the Community Action Program and the conflict that resulted:

Their tactics, when they became disruptive were presumably seen by the rest of the urban population as signs of the further deterioration of the community as a whole.²⁴

For the poor, of course, there may have been value in the conflict. For the government, however, conflict is seen as a negative value and one to be avoided. The lesson for government in the ONG experiment, community school boards, and the Community Action Agency programs is that citizen involvement is best tolerated under controlled, low-risk conditions. For the community boards, in particular, the boards function best in a system of checks and balances encased in a bureaucratic structure.

How can community boards become the "cornerstone of democracy" under such conditions? It is obvious that they cannot. They will continue in an impossible position as long as their accountability remains undefined. If it is to the Borough President, then some trade-offs are expected. There will have to be cooperation with his office in return for cooperation from him. If, however, it is to be to the community, to the residents of the board area, the source of accountability will shift. For this to be possible, and for the boards to retain this kind of independence, they are dependent upon a broad community constituency that they are only recently beginning to cultivate.

The Development of a Constituency

Chapter V has discussed in detail the efforts by individual boards to solicit community response and to keep their district residents informed of events that concern them. If Staten Island is typical of the rest of the city, however, a large percentage of people are unaware of the boards' existence. A study by Columbia University determined that only one in ten people sampled were aware of the existence of community boards.²⁵ In the seven Community Planning Districts with which the study dealt, the level of citizen knowledge about such matters as the existence or activities of the community school board or the planning board was found to be extraordinarily low. Only one in five had heard anything about decentralization of city services in their area.²⁶

The boards, of course, have made progress in informing their communities, and the recent front-page coverage of board meetings in the local paper has made a considerable difference. The continued involvement of the boards in planning and zoning matters also keeps them in the public eye. In addition, all boards have specific methods of relating to the communities beyond public hearings. Boards 1 and 2 now have community committees, although only 2 has non-board members on it. Board 1 has appointed one member to be a liaison with each community or civic group. Board 3 has

not made any special effort beyond relating to existing civic groups which already have board representation. It has probably made the least effort to involve the community beyond civic groups. Board 4 has now set aside one night per month for contacts with the community, and these have been very successful.

A major assumption of the Staten Island boards is that they are fairly representative of their communities, but this is not difficult since the island is primarily middle-class and white. The board members reflect the "composite of a community board member" as noted in the "Results of the Community Board Questionnaire" prepared for the Charter Revision Commission:

The typical community board member is a long time resident of New York City, around 45 years old, a college graduate, and white. Employed in a white-collar occupation, and a Democrat, the typical member also belongs to at least one civic, religious and/or fraternal organization.²⁷

If the boards are to develop a constituency on the island, they must seek support from all groups, including ethnic and racial minorities, and lower and middle-class. The boards have not been as successful in this, although they have tried. It is not uncommon to have blacks on the two north shore boards in particular, but they tend to play an inactive role on the boards, and some seldom come to meetings. Part of this may be due to the fact that active, articulate minority representatives (and this can mean income as well as

race) tend to be put on many different committees in many different organizations, and are therefore overcommitted timewise. Some of them are more reflective of the white middle-class than the lower-income minority population.

This lack of representation of some groups should be an ongoing concern for the boards, if they are to accurately represent the priorities of their districts. Overall representation is also important because of the tendency of residents to maintain a low level of activity in civic organizations until they are concerned or upset about some particular happening in their area. The fact that the community boards are currently under pressure from a number of civic groups to deal intelligently with the problems in their areas, primarily in terms of service delivery and new development, should not obscure that percentage of the population that is both unorganized and unaware of the boards' existence.

These low levels of neighborhood activity on the part of the public underscore the need for extensive information campaigns to apprise citizens of the channels through which they can exercise an influence on local matters. Without such knowledge on the part of the public, no effective system of local service delivery can hope to be utilized in the first place, and perceived as effective in the second, by its constituents.²⁸

It would seem at this time that the boards are unaware of the importance of this link with a broad constituency and the importance of accountability to this constituency. If they are to continue to

proceed on a more independent course, and in the process antagonize the man who appoints them, they will be subject to non-reappointment of certain members, and new members will be appointed with specific criteria in mind. Certainly selective appointments occur at present. Although the Borough President has said that over the years there has been only a handful of people submitting applications that were never appointed to the board, there are documented cases of where people with certain organizational ties were never appointed to a board. It is only within the last few months that this situation has changed, and members of these groups are being appointed.

Rights Versus Powers

Local Law 39 gives the boards certain rights, among them the right to hold public hearings; to advise and consult with administrators of city departments and agencies; to request cancellation of a public hearing of other agencies if the board has not had time to consider the matter; to create committees with non-board members as voting members; to obtain assistance from the City Planning Department and the Borough President's office. In the process, the boards have been increasingly effective in reviewing land use and capital development projects and in ascertaining community sentiment on major local issues. In spite of such progress, the boards

note major deficiencies in resources, power, and relationship with both city agencies and their communities, including:²⁹

1. Inadequate professional and technical staff assistance.
2. Inadequate resources for administrative expenses and for communications with district residents.
3. Inadequate visibility, including weak links with the community at large and minimal capacity to service citizen requests and complaints.
4. Insufficient use of the public hearing process and investigatory powers.
5. Non-existent or ineffective capacity to monitor service delivery of city operating agencies.
6. Weak relationships with most service and overhead agencies resulting in inadequate agency cooperation with the boards.
7. Over-identification with the Borough President at the expense of stronger ties with other municipal entities, including the Mayor, City Council, and operating agencies.
8. Insufficient involvement and authority in the planning and capital budget processes.
9. Almost no formal participation in the expense budget process.
10. No one office responsible to insure that Charter powers

and duties given to the boards are fully implemented.

With increasing pressure on the boards to become further involved with service delivery, the members have found a frustrating inability to force agency response. Board 4 has had two recent experiences, both of which have left it thoroughly disgusted with the lack of response. In one, the transportation and traffic committee had questioned the effectiveness of Executive Order 85 when, after writing nine letters to the relevant agencies, it received three "no actions" in reply. In the other case, a special Advisory Council of all boards had been established and chaired by Board 4 in order to establish some organized system for handling sewer complaints. Lack of cooperation by both other community boards and city agencies led to the recommendation at the meeting in January that the council be abolished.

As a result of situations similar to these, all four boards are pressing for new methods of soliciting agency response. Exception must be made throughout this discussion to City Planning and the Board of Standards and Appeals, both of which have established guidelines for dealing with the boards. Among the recent attempts to force agency response are the following: (1) an effort by Board 1 to subpoena the Highway Department after a lengthy period of inaction during which there was no response to the board's request for

a sidewalk; (2) a movement by Board 2 for defunding of a sewer project which was not wanted in the district; and (3) talk of instituting an injunction on buildings that failed to comply with the boards' requests, specifically where a zone variance or change was concerned.

In the second case, Board 2 had repeatedly questioned Water Resources about the need for a sewer project in the district. Because so much time is usually needed to complete sewer projects, the community was concerned that this one be done at all, and requested justification for it. City Planning had also tried to set up a meeting between the board and Water Resources, but to no avail. Finally the board recommended a request for defunding of the project, something that had been unprecedented to that date. The threat had two results. First, the chairman and vice-chairman of the board were requested to discuss the matter with the Borough President, and were told that the project would be coordinated so as to minimize the time involved. Second, an engineer from Water Resources appeared at the board meeting to discuss the project and answer questions. The board's strategy to force agency response was effective, as the members felt that doing such an unprecedented thing as requesting defunding would cause the agencies to wake up and recognize the legitimacy of the board's request. The board felt it completely within its rights to expect agencies to appear, explain

and defend their decisions.

When the repeated attempts by members of Board 2 failed to get answers to specific questions with regard to transportation and traffic problems, the borough traffic manager was asked to appear at a regular board meeting. Following an introduction by the manager in which he noted that his appearance was both to hear the board's questions and find out what the board could do for him, a dialogue on district problems followed. The new chairman of the board's Traffic Committee was very glad to have had the dialogue. He noted that after sending five letters and making twelve phone calls, and never once getting through to the traffic manager, he was "glad to see him and find out he's not a monster."

A third method of dealing with agencies is to request an injunction through the courts. The boards have noted that in some cases where they supported the granting of a variance or zone change with certain stipulations, they realized later that the development was approved without those stipulations. In one case, Board 3 noted an unauthorized use on the premises, and in another, unauthorized curb cuts in a development. The Building Department refused to respond to these violations. One of the vice-chairmen felt that the boards make an effort to work in conjunction with agencies but cannot because there is no cooperation. If the boards were to "zero in

on a good issue," he felt, request an injunction on the property, then the agency involved would have to respond.

An alternative to the above methods was suggested at a leadership meeting of the vice-chairmen. It was suggested that the boards jointly write and submit to the Charter Revision Commission a proposal for Charter amendment giving the boards leverage in dealing with agencies, primarily that agencies be made more accountable to the boards in explaining the basis for their decisions. They felt that possibly within the present powers of Local Law 39 it would be possible to receive the same 30-day extension for rebuttal that the agencies now have.

In any case, it seems that there is no turning back at this point from the movement in all four boards towards meaningful mechanisms for forcing agency response. It is indicative of a movement by the boards from a position of problem-solvers to one of community leadership.

Proliferation of Official and Unofficial Community Groups Involved With Government

The emergence of the community boards into obtaining the delivery of services for their districts bring with it the potential for both conflict and confusion with other official and unofficial community groups that claim to represent residents of the area and seek to

involve citizen participants as an integral part of their program. Since the goals of these various groups overlap, and since the intent is to involve the community in the decision-making process at some point, it would be well to be aware of the confusion that may arise over jurisdiction and duplication of effort, and the jealousies that may occur.

Executive Order 111 in October of 1969 created a Task Force for Comprehensive Health Planning "to develop a system for local participation in comprehensive health planning . . . demonstrating the feasibility of methods of consumer, provider and government participation in planning at local levels: borough-wide, community and neighborhood."³⁰ Two years later the Comprehensive Health Planning Agency was established by another Executive Order to establish standards and guidelines "for consumer, provider and government participation in all types of health planning at both city-wide and community levels."³¹ Membership includes providers, consumers, and city officials, as well as representatives of regional planning organizations, commerce and industry, labor, older residents, and consumer groups.

The Comprehensive Health Planning Agency has at present no lay people on it, and yet it is formulating the health priorities for the health planning districts. At the same time, the district

community boards are also concerned with health care and facilities for the same group of people, and are involved in establishing health priorities. Both groups have worked in relative isolation; both claim to represent the same people; both are participation oriented. The composition of the Comprehensive Health Planning Agency, however, is oriented towards institution representatives and people with expertise. This "professionalism" may conflict with the lay composition of community board members.

A situation somewhat similar to this is the New York City Council Against Poverty which was established by Executive Order 28 in July, 1968, to determine overall program plans and priorities for the city in its attack against poverty. It provides for the "creation or recognition of community corporations or other organizations as the primary instruments for citizen participation and community action in particular areas of the City."³² The basic orientation of the program is towards groups already recognized as vehicles for citizen participation, but like Comprehensive Health Planning, these tend to be the people and groups known to government rather than grass-roots organizations. The composition of the Council (fifty-one members) includes seventeen official public officials of the city; nine representatives of business, industry, labor, religious groups, welfare, and other major groups to be selected by its governing

body; and twenty-five seats held by representatives of the poor in communities in the city designated as poverty areas by the city, "to be selected by democratic selection procedures."³³

What this means is that there is one representative for Staten Island speaking for the needs of the whole borough--one person who is said to be representative of the community, and who is considered the citizen participant. Will this person be articulating the same community priorities as the community boards?

A much less formal and official body also claiming to ascertain community problems is the Precinct Community Council established in each precinct district by the Police Department of the city. Membership is open to anyone who lives or works in the precinct area and represents a "cross-section of civic-minded volunteers which will carry out a program of activities . . . which will emphasize the mutual interdependence of the community at large and the police in the maintenance of law and order and in the prevention of crime."³⁴ Until recently, the Council and the Police Committees of the community boards worked independently, but within the last few months the Councils have requested representation from each community board. The local approach by both board and Council should facilitate coordination of efforts.

Another agency, the Staten Island Community Corporation, is

a Community Action Agency directed towards the development of a high quality, broadly based social service system "in which the participation of the poor in the policy and administrative processes is solidly established."³⁵ Unlike the Council Against Poverty, the Community Corporation seems to seek citizen input on a local level, has encouraged local residents' input in decision-making, and is consumer rather than provider oriented. Its main concern has been the need for comprehensive community planning and programming, and the elimination of the present isolation of related activities seeking the same ends.

It is imperative that the existing mechanisms for community participation, organization and development form a solid structural foundation for an effective governing process regarding self determination for both the service consumer and the general community.³⁶

It is obvious from the Master Plan that the Community Corporation views the present method of resource allocation as inadequate for the low-income community's needs. Unlike both the Council Against Poverty and the Human Resources Administration, both of which use the entire borough as the district boundary, the Community Corporation focuses on individual neighborhoods. When the Anti-Poverty Council speaks of citizen participation, it means one member from the Staten Island community on the Council. When the Community Corporation solicits citizen input, it wants residents from

the area, and as many as possible. The borough-wide view, according to its Master Plan, will distort the allocation of resources because those residents who presently have the least amount of benefits will be averaged with the large numbers of middle and upper-class residents.³⁷

In defining community priorities, the priorities are representative of the people defining them and whom they represent. The community boards represent a white middle-class constituency of very vocal, active elements of the community. The boards, until recently, have acted in relative isolation from other community groups such as Comprehensive Health Planning, Community Corporation, Anti-Poverty Council, HRA, etc. Some of these groups have not been anxious to get involved with the boards; others have solicited board representation and are interested in coordinating their activities with those of the boards. Some of this cooperation may be "window-dressing"; some is legitimate. The net result, however, is how well community priorities and needs are defined.

Board 2 has made the greatest progress in getting the broad community input needed, due to its community committee structure. What is still needed is coordination with other community groups who share similar concerns. What is also necessary is that the board recognize that some of these groups share different concepts

of who should be participating in decision making and that they may attempt to maintain an elitist approach. They may also avoid working with the boards, or resent the boards becoming more involved in their "territory." It is even conceivable that the boards will attempt to elicit action from these groups that is more responsive to residents than to some ideal.

As if this proliferation of agencies and groups with their overlapping functions was not confusing enough, there is over all of them the Office of Neighborhood Government, designed to coordinate the delivery of all city services for the planning district, to review and comment upon agency policies and programs submitted to it, and to respond to community proposals for changes in local services.³⁸ Although no office has been established on Staten Island as yet, it would seem that there again may be a confusion in responsibilities. The intent of the Office is to establish an administrative structure first that can deal with community problems and service delivery, and later relate to the community. Whether such a structure can coordinate the variety of agencies and groups that currently compete for constituencies remains to be seen.

Conclusions

An analysis of the community boards in this chapter reveals

two common themes. One concerns the different interpretations of the concept of community, who constitutes the community, and who represents the community. The other concerns the focus of accountability of the boards in the exercise of their rights.

A number of official and unofficial agencies, including the community boards, claim to represent the community and to involve this community in an advisory capacity. At some point, these groups make the assumption that they are representative of this community and have the authority to determine community priorities. The degree to which a wide variety of interests are represented on these agencies, the amount of interaction with other groups sharing similar concerns, and the effort made to collaborate with their constituencies in the decision-making process will reflect on the allocation of resources in that community.

The way in which agencies view community participants will depend on whether the agencies encourage or suppress participation. Those agencies concerned with developing a broad constituency will develop vehicles through which citizens can voice opinions and get immediate feedback. The community boards that have encouraged the development of active community committees have considerably expanded their sphere of both influence and input opportunities.

Developing such a constituency for its decisions creates a

dual system of accountability for the boards in that they focus on both Borough Hall and the wider community. The situation is somewhat similar to the City Planning Commission which is appointed by the Mayor but operates within an independent status, and is also responsible to all of the citizens of New York. Local Law 39 is very vague on the relationship between the Borough President and the community boards, beyond the basic responsibilities of record keeping, staffing and removal of members. The relationship is therefore open to change on the initiative of either the Borough President or the boards themselves. Since the law is also flexible on the degree of interaction between the boards and residents, and assumes the members are representative of the interests of the entire districts, some additional measures of accountability are called for.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The membership of the community boards on Staten Island represents a highly articulate, intelligent, and active group of people motivated by a desire to "do what is right for their community." That they have been fairly successful in achieving this goal is well documented. It is reasonable to conclude from this that the boards fulfill four main functions that justify their continued existence. These are: (1) serving as a partner in the planning process; (2) establishing community priorities; (3) serving as a liaison between government and the community; and (4) maintaining a "watchdog" function on local government.

As a partner in the planning process, the boards become part of an on-going dialogue between the community and both the local Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission itself. Citizen involvement through the boards has helped to determine community priorities. It has been documented time after time that there is a difference in needs as defined by government and city agencies, and the needs perceived as important by the residents.

Community opposition over district projects that have not first been discussed by the community board frequently result in delaying or permanently enjoining a project. The process of gaining community input delays a project also, but the result is usually a more acceptable addition to the district because changes are frequently made that make it so to the residents.

Citizens need information about decisions that affect them, and they need channels for responding to those decisions. In the process, the members are exposed to the problems, the trade-offs that may be involved in solving them, and the alternatives available. This exposure begins a process in public education in which board members are able to develop a planning philosophy that will aid them in making future planning decisions.

In serving as a watchdog on local government, the boards' role is particularly important because of the apathy of most people towards involvement in government. If things are going well and nothing infringes directly on someone's property, that person tends to remain uninvolved and uninterested in what is happening in the rest of the community. It is only when something threatens them directly, or a city service fails, or they are inconvenienced, that they demand services and responsive government. In the meantime, however, someone must be aware of district-wide problems

and future needs. The boards are particularly well equipped for this because of the members' wide range of interests, expertise, and community involvement.

The boards are at a particularly interesting period in their existence as they experiment with influencing the decision-making process in the borough and as they press for increased delivery of services and accountability by city agencies. Although they retain very limited authority, the rights delegated to them by Local Law 39, combined with new moves towards use of subpoena power, injunctions, defunding, and notification by agencies, has been expanding the considerable amount of influence they already exercise. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the boards should play a major role in service delivery for their communities. The monitoring of a multitude of different service problems within each district is not only beyond the scope of unpaid volunteers who have only limited amounts of time to give to board affairs, but is not within the true context of the functions the boards should serve.

These functions are primarily planning functions. The members serve to consolidate the views of a variety of interests within a fairly limited geographic area, to consider the alternatives, and to make recommendations on the basis of what they feel are in the best interests of the district. Service delivery is, of course, a part of

this process, but only in the sense of both short-and long-range community development and in the sense that planning involves not only the physical aspects of community life, but also how these relate to such areas as health, recreation, social services, and housing. If a board becomes aware of a series of sewer complaints from an area of the community, it should investigate the need for new lines to serve the area. The board cannot and should not become an intermediary in each and every complaint. Its main focus should be on overall community planning needs.

It would be highly desirable to link the community boards more directly with an agency or office with direct ties to the Mayor's office. Such a link would have more value in a politically decentralized governmental structure because decision making could occur on the local level, but it would be of value in any case in order to enable the boards to exert influence on city agencies. If the District Manager experiment expands to Staten Island, the boards should be a member of the office and not act in an ex officio capacity as they do at present in districts elsewhere in the city where the experiment is in effect.

This study of the community boards has uncovered several areas in which procedural changes would increase the accountability and effectiveness of the boards. Accountability at present is focused

towards the Borough President, since he appoints the members and can also remove them for cause. On the one hand, some members charge alleged interference by the executive in board matters; on the other hand, most boards have failed to become widely known and have not developed a strong constituency in their respective districts. The boards must recognize that they have to be accountable to someone, either to the Borough President, the community, to some other body, or to some combination of these. As a bridge between government and community, they have a dual commitment. Those boards that have been able to develop a working relationship with Borough Hall are best able to bridge this gap. Those that are "politically astute," "play the game," compromise, and engage in trade-offs, while simultaneously retaining individuality and independence in decision making, will be best able to function effectively within this current duality.

Two alternatives are proposed for dealing with the problems associated with the current method of appointment. One would be to expand input into this procedure by mandating appointment jointly by the Borough President and Borough Improvement Board with consultation by the individual community boards. This would force involvement by the Councilmen from Staten Island, who, at present, do not personally attend board meetings. The fact that Councilmanic

districts do not coincide with planning district boundaries would not be a limiting factor since the Councilmen would be appointing as a single governmental body.

A second alternative would be to leave the appointment process under the Borough President as at present, but mandate consultation with the community boards, and make special provisions for increasing the boards' visibility through the building of a community constituency. Criteria could be established for mandating public hearings and for the methods of public notification when a matter will significantly affect the community. Just as a broad survey was initiated by the City Planning Commission in 1966 to determine the criteria for establishing the boundaries of planning districts, a similar method could be used to determine the most effective forms of notifying the public.

Although other alternatives exist for changing the appointment procedure, these are two which are feasible and meaningful alternatives to the present appointment system. Broadening the appointment process would be supplemented by other procedural changes. Specifically, before appointment, prospective members should: (1) serve a three to six month probationary period on one of the standing or community committees, and (2) submit to a screening program to both acquaint them with the obligations of board membership and

to ascertain their interest in becoming members.

There are several advantages to this type of appointment system. In the first place, these measures would add considerably to improving the continuity of the board, since appointments are made not only at the beginning of each year, but also periodically throughout the year as vacancies arise, or as new people apply. Secondly, they would contribute to getting board members that are willing to make a genuine time commitment to board matters. In the third place, the process would be responsive to the lower-income, non-white portions of the population who may very well feel uncomfortable in the highly articulate and sometimes complicated discussions at board meetings. It is often difficult for the present membership to follow some of the discussions and vote intelligently on motions. Much reliance is placed on the committee reports and recommendations for this reason.

One structural change that would be responsive to expanding the opportunities for broader community representation is to mandate community committees for each board. In spite of the fact that the boards operate well within a highly flexible and adaptive committee structure which can respond to community needs as they arise, the community committees serve as a convenient way for prospective members to become involved with the board (particularly from low-

income areas), and for considerably expanding the visibility of the boards. Mandated geographical representation is a second structural change that is strongly recommended to supplement the appointment procedures outlined in this chapter.

The real contribution the community boards can make is articulated in Walsh's article, "What Price Decentralization in New York."¹ In discussing the recent moves in the city for decentralization, she feels that making government responsible and accountable would be a far greater contribution to real political decentralization than decentralizing administratively by creating small councils that have command of very limited resources. "Meaningful changes must, therefore, center on changes in the behavior of the bureaucracy."² Just focusing on neighborhood councils or smaller governing units is not enough; it is necessary to strengthen those already in existence and establish accountability within the administration.

It is for this reason that elections have not been advocated as the best answer to the problems facing the boards. Instituting the procedural and structural recommendations made in this chapter will do much to focus accountability of the boards towards the people they represent, and to strengthen their ability to influence the decision-making process. The problems the boards face stem as

much from the way in which bureaucracy and the political process function as from deficiencies in Local Law 39 itself.

Any decisions for changing the character, structure, and functions of the community boards must take into account the effect these would have on the participatory nature of the boards. The present type of citizen participation, advisory as it is and limited in actual decision-making power, is a perfectly acceptable role in the context of the functions the boards serve at present. The only major change proposed in the functions of the boards is to increase their authority in making first instance planning decisions, including the siting of capital projects. If the boards were to significantly increase their authority, their character may change. They may become more like the bureaucracy they are trying to influence, may be more susceptible to political pressure, and may cease to think of themselves as representatives of their communities.

Whatever changes may come about in city government as a result of the various alternatives being considered for decentralization, the community boards have a valid role to fulfill under conditions of both centralization or decentralization. It is in their role of resident advisors in the planning process that they have the most to offer their communities. It is important that the boards continue in such a fashion so as to refrain from becoming another layer of

government serving only to insulate the bureaucracy from the demands of the community.

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES

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²⁰John E. Zuccotti, Towards Effective Citizen Planning, Testimony before the State Charter Revision Commission for New York City, March 30, 1973, cited by Imre Kovacs, "Community Boards," p. 52.

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CHAPTER V

¹The material in this chapter relating to the history of the Staten Island community boards and the characteristics of the Brooklyn boards represents a composite of observations, attitudes, and information culled from a number of people who have been involved with the community boards over a period of time. It is not presumed to be all-inclusive or even absolutely objective, since the material reflects a variety of personal observations and opinions. All interviews took place on Staten Island in March and April, 1974. Those interviewed include:

John Collins, Chairman, Board 1

George Olsen, Chairman, Board 2

Trevor Mills, Chairman, Board 3

Lorraine Sorge, Chairman, Board 4

Russell Kimmerly, past chairman, Board 3

John Braniff, Special Consultant to the Community Boards

Robert Millward, Director, Department of City Planning, Staten Island

Beverly Schwarz, Planner, Department of City Planning, Staten Island, and Community Board Liaison, Boards 1 and 2

Syrette Dym, Planner, Department of City Planning, Staten Island, and Community Board Liaison, Boards 3 and 4

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CHAPTER VI

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¹²Bureau of Applied Social Research, Between Community and City Bureaucracy (New York: Columbia University, 1973), p. 1.

¹³Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴Lindsay, Program for the Decentralized Administration, p. 11.

¹⁵Marilyn Gittell, Evaluation of Community Participation in the ONG Experiment, p. 77.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁷Gittell, Evaluation of Community Participation, citing Sidney Verba and Norma H. Nie, Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality, p. 23.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Gittell, Evaluation of Community Participation, p. 77.

²⁰Marilyn Gittell, Maurice R. Berube, Boulton H. Demas, Daniel Flavin, Mark Rosentraub, Adele Spier, and David Tatge, School Boards and School Policy (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. ix.

²¹Ibid.

²²Marilyn Gittell, Maurice R. Berube, Frances Gottfried, Marcia Guttentag, Adele Spier, Local Control in Education (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 128.

²³Gittell, School Boards and School Policy, p. 156.

²⁴Daniel P. Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 163.

²⁵Nathalie Friedman and Naomi Golding, "Urban Residents and Neighborhood Government: A Profile of the Public in Seven Urban Neighborhoods of New York City" (New York: New York City Neighborhood Study for the Charter Revision Commission, June, 1973).

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Kovacs, Community Boards, Appendix C-1.

²⁸Gittell, Evaluation of Community Participation, p. 25.

²⁹State Charter Revision Commission for New York City (unpublished report on the Community Boards, March, 1974), pp. 2-3.

³⁰New York, N. Y., Executive Order No. 111, Office of the Mayor (October 24, 1969), p. 5.

³¹New York, N. Y., Executive Order No. 48, Office of the Mayor (August 30, 1971), p. 1.

³²New York, N. Y., Executive Order No. 28, Office of the Mayor (July 1, 1968), p. 1.

³³Ibid., pp. 2-3.

³⁴Police Department, City of New York, Constitution and By-Laws of the 120th Precinct Community Council, p. 1.

³⁵Staten Island Community Corporation, Master Plan (New York, 1972), p. 11.

³⁶Ibid., p. 12.

³⁷Ibid., p. 16.

CHAPTER VII

¹Walsh, "What Price Decentralization in New York."

²Ibid., p. 7.

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APPENDIX A

LOCAL LAWS
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
FOR THE YEAR 1969

No. 39

A LOCAL LAW

To amend the New York city charter in relation to community boards.

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1, Section 84 of the New York city charter is hereby repealed and reenacted to read as follows:

Section 84. Community boards. There shall be a community board for each community district created by the city planning commission pursuant to section eighty-three hereof. Each board shall consist of the Councilman at Large and the district councilmen elected from any area which includes a part or all of such community district and not more than fifty persons appointed by the borough president, after consultation with such district councilmen, who have a residence or a business, professional or other significant interest in the district and the Councilman at Large. In making such appointments the borough president shall give due regard to representation for each neighborhood within such district. Not more than twenty-five per cent of such appointments shall be city employees.

a. Members of community boards appointed by the borough president shall serve for overlapping terms of two years, one-half of the membership being renewed each year. They may be reappointed, and shall be removable by the borough president for cause. Three consecutive unexecuted absences from meeting of the board and the unexcused absence from more than one-half of the meetings called in any one year shall be a sufficient cause for removal. Vacancies shall be filed by the borough president for the remainder of the unexpired term.

b. Members of community boards shall serve as such without compensation.

c. Each such board shall:

1. Consider the needs of the district for which it serves and develop plans for the district's welfare and orderly development, including matters relating to only part of the district or to areas only partly within the district.

2. Advise, either on its own initiative or when requested, any public officer, agency or legislative body with respect to any matter relating to the welfare of the district, and its residents, but in each instance shall furnish the borough president with a copy of every written communication or statement giving such advice.

3. At its discretion hold public or private hearings or investigations with respect to any such matter.

4. Cooperate and consult with the local administrators of city departments and agencies having administrative districts including any part of the district it serves.

5. Assist city departments and agencies in making contacts with and transmitting information to the people of its district.

6. Cooperate with the boards of other districts with respect to matters of common concern, including matters which relate to parts of more than one district.

7. Render an annual report to the mayor and the borough president within three months of the end of each year and such other reports as the mayor or the borough president shall require. Such reports or summaries thereof shall be published in the City Record.

8. Keep minutes of its meeting and furnish copies to the borough president who shall be the custodian for all the records of such board.

9. Use all practical means to keep the public informed on matters relating to the welfare or development of its district.

10. Perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law.

d. All city agencies, except the Board of Estimate, Housing and Development Administration, the Environmental Protection Administration, Police Department and City Council, which require public hearings before they may act on matters before them, shall refer such matters to the community boards by furnishing their calendars or notices of meeting to the chairman of each such board and such other persons as the chairman may designate. At or before such public hearing, each community board shall, in the case of a capital project proposed by the City Planning Commission lying in whole or in part in its district, or in the case of a site for any such project proposed by the Site Selection Board, and may, with respect

to any other matter referred to it, give its recommendation with respect to such matter. Such public hearing shall be adjourned once at the request of a community board when made on the grounds that the board has not had an opportunity to act on a matter referred to it unless the agency concerned by a majority vote of its members shall determine that circumstances warrant that it act without adjournment. If a recommendation is made by a community board it shall be reflected in the record of the agency with respect to such matter. In the event a community board shall fail to make a recommendation, the agency may nonetheless act, but its record shall reflect that no recommendation was made. Such agency shall notify the community boards of each action taken subsequent to such public hearing including adjournments thereof.

e. Each board shall meet at least once each month except during the months of July and August. The borough president shall provide each board with a meeting place if requested by the board.

f. Each such board may create committees on matters relating to the welfare or development of its district. It may include in such committees persons with a residence or pertinent interest in the community who are not members of the board, but each such committee shall have a member of the board as its chairman.

g. Each such board shall elect its own officers and keep a public record of its activities and transactions, including minutes of its meetings and majority and minority reports.

h. Each such board may employ such assistants as it may require within appropriations therefor or using funds contributed therefor. The borough president shall provide suitable administrative assistance to expedite and coordinate the work of such boards, and the director of city planning shall provide professional assistance to aid them in the planning of their communities.

i. All agencies of the city shall give to such boards such information necessary for their work which they shall require.

j. The mayor shall call at least one meeting each year at which he, the members of the city planning commission, the borough presidents or their representatives, the councilmen and any other officers he may invite shall meet with the chairmen of the community boards or their designated representatives for the purpose of discussing the city-wide master plan and other planning matters affecting the whole city or more than one borough. The agenda for each such meeting shall be prepared in consultation with the mayor and the city planning commission. Each borough president shall call at least one meeting each year at which he, the councilmen from such borough, the members of the city planning commission and any

officers he may invite shall meet with the chairmen of the community boards within his borough or their designated representatives for the purpose of discussing borough-wide planning matters and other matters affecting more than one district and their relation to the master plan. The agenda for such meeting shall be prepared jointly by the borough president and the councilmen from such borough in consultation with the city planning commission.

Section 2. Paragraph 5 of subdivision b of section 191 of said charter is hereby amended to read as follows:

"5. Provide to the community boards, when established, such staff assistance as he may determine."

Section 3. This local law shall take effect immediately.

The City of New York, Office of the City Clerk, s. s.:

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a local law of The City of New York, passed by the Council on June 5, 1969 and approved by the Mayor on June 16, 1969.

Herman Katz, City Clerk, Clerk of the Council.

Certification Pursuant To Municipal Home Rule Law Section 27

Pursuant to the provisions of Municipal Home Rule Law Section 27, I hereby certify that the enclosed local law (Local Law 39 of 1969, Council Int. 773 Print 911-996) contains the correct text and:

Received the following vote at the meeting of the New York City Council on June 5, 1969: thirty-six (36) affirmative votes.

Was approved by the Mayor on June 16, 1969.

Was returned to the City Clerk on June 16, 1969.

J. LEE RANKIN, Corporation Counsel.

APPENDIX B

BY-LAWS FOR COMMUNITY BOARDS OF STATEN ISLAND
EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1970 BASED ON EXISTING
PROCEDURE ESTABLISHED BY THE
BOROUGH PRESIDENT AND LOCAL LAW #39 (REVISED)

Name: The boards shall hereinafter be officially designated as Local Community Boards.

I. OFFICERS AND MEMBERSHIP

- (a) Board officers shall be an elected Chairman and a Vice-Chairman. Working Chairmen shall be appointed by the Chairman of the board, and they may select their own committee members.
- (b) Each officer must be a member of the board and shall be elected for a one year term commencing in January and concluding in December. It is further provided that no officer shall serve more than two consecutive one year terms at any one time.
- (c) Election - Election of board officers will be held in the month of November. A nominating committee of three to five members, appointed by the board chairman, shall meet two weeks prior to the November board meeting to select, consider and verify nominees, to present to the board at the November meeting. Additional candidates may be nominated from the floor. Election shall be by secret ballot. A majority vote of the members present will elect a candidate, if a quorum is verified.

II. QUORUM

A quorum which shall consist of one third of the board membership, but not less than 8 members must be present for all board business.

III. FUNCTIONS OF BOARDS

- (a) A board's primary interest and activity will be with matters

within its own geographic boundaries unless a specific problem involves more than one area. In this case there should be a joint action with any other boards involved, by decision on action taken. - - On island wide matters, all boards shall make their recommendations to the borough president.

- (b) Routine recommendations, complaints that involve failure of a city department to take prior appropriate action, or if a department has taken unsatisfactory action in a particular situation may be referred directly to the city department concerned or submitted to the Director of Community Boards for appropriate agency contact with a copy or memo to the borough president. Where pertinent a copy should also be sent to the person initiating the action and so indicated on the original letter to the agency.
- (c) Matters originated by or referred to a board by the borough president, or referred by letter from the community in the area of the board or a substantial portion of it, will be acted upon by the board directly.
- (d) At the direction of the borough president each board shall make recommendations with respect to the Capital Budget yearly - both for its district and the Island. A joint meeting of the boards' Capital Budget representatives will be held in the month of October for such purpose.
- (e) At the beginning of each year the Chairman of each board shall meet with the borough president to discuss and make recommendations concerning the manner in which available planning funds shall be expended in his area.

IV. STANDING COMMITTEES

Each board shall have seven standing (working) committees. They will study and make confidential reports on meetings under their jurisdiction to the board with recommendation for board action. These committees are:

1. Planning & Zoning
2. Hospitals & Health
3. Police & Fire Department
4. Sanitation & Pollution Control

5. Schools & Education
6. Transportation & Traffic
7. Parks & Recreation

V. SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Other committees of both members and non-members may be authorized by the Chairman with approval of the members.

VI. MEETING SCHEDULE OF BOARDS

- (a) Meetings shall be held on a monthly basis starting in January and ending in December with a summer recess during July and August. Special meetings will be held at the call of the Borough President or by a quorum of the members.
 - (1) Minutes shall be taken by stenographers provided by the Borough President and reviewed by the Board Chairman before issue.
- (b) During the course of the year, the working committee chairmen shall meet jointly at the call of the Chairman of the Community Boards. A meeting shall be held during the month of June to review the activities of each of the committees during the previous six months, and to make recommendations with respect to the overall policy concerning the development and planning of Staten Island. A meeting shall be held within the first ten days of November for final discussions and recommendations with respect to the capital budget. Consideration of the board to attend City Planning Commission public hearings, Council public hearings and Board of Estimate hearings, which follows, should be made at this meeting and representatives chosen, if so decided.
- (c) Two weeks prior to each Board meeting, an agenda shall be prepared by the chairman and a copy left with the Director of Community Boards. Technical information from the Borough President's staff (Engineering Bureau) from the Borough President's files and other sources concerning a particular subject on the Agenda shall be compiled and made available to the board for its meeting.

VII. PUBLIC HEARINGS

The chairman of the Community Board will call all public hearings deemed necessary as voted upon by the Board. Each board, through its working committees shall conduct hearings on matters under consideration as deemed appropriate. Invitations to attend shall be sent by mail to groups and residents affected by the Borough President's office. All members of their board can attend all public hearings.

VIII. PUBLICITY

Releases to the public shall be given only after approval by the Board. A copy of the substance of a minority vote report shall also be given. A copy of such release shall be left with the Borough President's office.

No member or committee shall speak or write in behalf of the Board, nor for any committee of the board, unless so directed by the approval of the Board.

The press as well as the general public shall be notified of open hearings scheduled by the respective community boards, and allowed to attend the non-executive session only.

IX. AMENDMENTS

Amendments to the Procedure and By-Laws shall be made by the Borough President after receipt of the Executive Committee's request for same in writing or after written proposal approved by a board, and forwarded to his office.

X. ROBERTS RULES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

It will be the official basis for all board operations not inconsistent with By-Laws and Local Law #39.

XI. ADDENDUM

There will be two Service Committees that will be independent of above regulations, but will act to assist the boards in their operations. They will be:

An Executive Committee - composed of the present and past board officers (chairman, vice-chairman). This group will determine and set forth operating procedures and policies for the four boards and make such recommendations to the Borough President, as it deems necessary for his approval.

A Professional Advisory Committee - Composed of individuals in various professions appointed by the Borough President. They will give required professional critique and assistance to the boards on request. Board Chairmen and members shall be free to propose matters to the boards for their consideration.

APPENDIX C

BY-LAWS FOR COMMUNITY BOARDS OF STATEN ISLAND,
EFFECTIVE 1968.

I. MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICERS

1. The Borough President shall appoint each member for a term of one year commencing January 1st. No member may serve more than three consecutive terms, but may be re-appointed after one year's absence for a succeeding term or terms not to exceed a total of three terms.

2. The officers shall be a Chairman, a Vice Chairman, and a Secretary.

3. Each officer must be a member of the Board and shall be elected by the membership for a term not exceeding one year. No officer may succeed himself.

4. Each member shall either reside within the district of the Board on which he serves, or have a business affiliation within the area.

5. It is felt that frequent absence from Board meetings would indicate a lack of interest; therefore, when a Board member fails to attend three meetings without notifying either the Chairman of the Board or the Director of Community Planning Boards of inability to attend, the member shall automatically cease to be a member.

II. JURISDICTION AND OBJECTIVE OF BOARDS

1. Each Board should confine its activities to its own area unless they feel that a specific problem involves more than one area, in which case there should be joint action with any other Boards involved.

2. Routine recommendations, complaints that involve the failure of a department to take appropriate action, or the fact that a department has taken unsatisfactory action in a particular situation should be referred directly to the city department concerned or

submitted to the Director of Community Planning Boards for appropriate referral with a copy to the Borough President. A copy of referral letter should be sent to the person who initiated the action and so noted on letter to department concerned.

3. Matters originated by a Board, referred to a Board by the Borough President, or referred by letter from the community - which involve the entire area of the Board or a substantial portion of it - should be acted upon by the appropriate Working Committee of the Board. Subsequently, their recommendation should be acted upon by the Board itself.

4. The only function of the Working Committee is to make recommendations to the Board as a whole, and they should neither correspond with residents nor give releases to the press on their recommendations.

5. After a Board as a whole votes on a particular matter, the following action should be taken:

When a recommendation to a local office of a city department is involved, direct communication from the Chairman to the head of that particular department should be written with a copy to both the Borough President and the Director of Community Planning Boards.

If a recommendation to the Commissioner of a Department is involved, the recommendation should be presented to the Borough President. The Director of Community Planning Boards will prepare an appropriate letter to the Commissioner involved for the Borough President's signature, if the Director concurs in the recommendation. If the Director disagrees with the recommendation he will attach to the Board's recommendation a statement as to his dissent.

If the Borough President disagrees with the recommendation of the Board, he will make known to the Director of Community Planning Boards his reason for dissent. The Director of Community Planning Boards will, in turn, by letter advise the Chairman of the Board.

Where the recommendation of the Board does not coincide with the position of the Borough President and the subject matter

involves the jurisdiction of the City Planning Commission, the Board may communicate directly with the Commission and send representatives before its hearings to testify on the matter.

6. A function of each Board, at the direction of the Borough President, will be to make recommendations with respect to the Capital Budget each year. The time schedule will be as follows:

Between May 1st and no later than September 15, each board shall study what capital projects should be initiated and constructed within its area within the following fiscal year starting July 1st. A more detailed and specific procedure will be sent to each Board.

7. At such time as planning funds are available to the Borough President, each Board shall make recommendations to the Borough President concerning the manner in which these funds shall be expended.

III. MEETING SCHEDULE OF PLANNING BOARDS

1. Ten meetings shall be held on a monthly basis starting in January and ending in December with a summer recess during July and August.

2. During the course of the year, the nine Working Committee chairmen shall meet jointly on at least two occasions at the call of the Director of Community Planning Boards. One of these meetings shall be held during the month of June to review the activities of each of the committees during the previous six months, and to make recommendations to the Borough President with respect to the overall policy concerning the development and planning of Staten Island.

Another of these meetings will be within the first ten days of November so that final discussions and recommendations can be made with respect to the capital budget, including consideration of whether or not representatives from the Board should attend the City Planning Commission public hearings, the Council public hearings, and the Board of Estimate public hearings, which will follow in sequence thereafter.

3. One week before each Board meeting, an agenda shall be prepared for the next meeting and a copy of same shall be left

with the Director of Community Planning Boards so that any technical information from the Borough President's Engineering Bureau, from the files of the Borough President's Department, or information from any action that has been taken by the Borough President or his Cabinet concerning a particular subject may be researched and made available to the Board.

This would not limit consideration by the Board of new matters not on the agenda provided (as is required in the Board of Estimate) the entire membership present votes to consider the matter.

IV. ZONING

Since the authority for initiating any zone change is within the sole jurisdiction of the City Planning Commission, except that by virtue of Section 201 of the New York City Charter, any taxpayer may, during the month of January in each year, make application for an appropriate zone change, the Planning Boards should diligently investigate the propriety of such changes through its Planning and Zoning Commission.

The zoning committee should first make a detailed study and when the matter is referred to the Board, it should hold public hearings prior to rendering its decision.

The recommendation of the Board including minority report, if any, shall be communicated to the Borough President and to the Chairman of the City Planning Commission by letter. A representative from the Board (the Chairman of the Zoning Committee, or a member of that committee, or a member appointed by the Chairman of the Board) should attend the City Planning Commission hearings and speak in behalf of the recommendation of the Board. Likewise, hearings before the Board of Estimate should also be attended.

V. GUESTS

Periodically, at the call of the Borough President, joint meetings of all four Boards will be held, not only for the purpose of conference with the Borough President, but also to hear guest speakers either high level officials within the City government, or experts in various fields from outside the city government.

The respective Community Planning Boards and their working committees may request to hear officials from the local offices of the various city departments, or others, with specialties appropriate to matters pending before the Boards. The request of a representative of a city department shall be channeled through the Director of Community Planning Boards.

VI. PUBLIC OPEN HEARINGS

Each board should conduct open hearings on all important matters it considers, and an appropriate release should be given to the press for notification to the public in general well in advance of such hearings. A notice should be sent to the local paper of such open hearings so that a reporter may be present, if the paper deems it advisable.

VII. PUBLICITY

Releases to the press shall be given only as a result of a decision by the Board. Such releases shall be given by the chairman directly to the news media concerned, after the decision has been taken by a Board. At the same time, the Chairman shall release the substance of the minority vote, if any was taken. Simultaneously, a copy of such release shall be left with the Director of Community Planning Boards for the Borough President.

No member shall speak for the Board of which he is a member, whether or not he is an officer, unless by a vote of the Board at a regular meeting.

The press as well as the general public should be notified of open hearings scheduled by the respective Community Planning Boards.

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DECENTRALIZING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN THE PLANNING PROCESS:

A STUDY OF THE
COMMUNITY BOARDS ON STATEN ISLAND

by

Marsha S. Bruhn

(ABSTRACT)

The study focused on the role and function of the official citizen advisory bodies in New York City known as the community boards. The boards were considered within the framework of recent moves for decentralization of city government and increased opportunities for citizen participation. They were evaluated in terms of: (1) their ability to serve as effective vehicles for citizen participation within the decentralized structure of the City Planning Commission; and (2) their ability to achieve more responsive city government.

Operational procedures, organizational structure, and functions were examined in detail for the four Staten Island boards. Consideration of the interaction of the boards with local governmental bodies, city agencies and community groups revealed specific problem areas in accountability, representation, agency relations, and the appointment process.

The study concluded that continuance of the boards' role in a partnership capacity with the City Planning Commission is a valid one in enabling the boards to establish community priorities, to serve as a liaison between government and the community, and to maintain a watchdog position on local government. Procedural and structural changes were recommended. The study proposed two alternatives to the present method of appointment to broaden accountability of the boards to the people they represent and to increase their influence in the decision-making process.