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Colorado Planning Notebook

THE PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE

Discovering your community's
advantages and shortcomings

Community Planning Section /
Colorado Division of
Commerce & Development
600 State Services Bldg
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I

One of the most often quoted phrases heard in relation to planning is "Survey - then plan". This infers the need to gather certain basic material about an area and the way in which it has developed before any real planning can begin. But before the survey can be made, it must be determined what to survey. Thus the term "preliminary reconnaissance" is used to denote a pre-survey of the area as a preliminary to the detailed survey required in order to plan.

Who should undertake the reconnaissance?

Primarily it is the responsibility of the planning commission to set up the planning program, including items in the survey. Thus it is this commission that should make the reconnaissance, along with their planning consultant, if they have contracted with one.

The need for a fresh view

Complete familiarity with an area often blinds one to its problems and faults, since these faults, like disease germs, have likely crept in un-awares. So gradually do imperfections appear, residents may not be aware of their presence until they have become a distinct menace. Thus the community needs to be looked at and analyzed as though it were being seen for the first time, with frankness and criticism the spirit of the observation.

Tools for the reconnaissance

Each commissioner or party taking part in the reconnaissance should have a good map of the area and include all of the adjacent territory that has any influence upon the primary area. The map should be detailed enough to show street names and widths, streams, railroads, lakes and other topographic features to identify locations. Enough clear space to make notes upon the map or its borders should be available. The map, along with a pencil and eraser, will be all the tools required.

Methods of observation

There should be at least three phases of the reconnaissance. First, a trip be the entire group by bus - or, if at all possible, by plane, - for a quick observation only. Natural physical characteristics of the area and large-scale man-made features are noted. The second phase should be a separate trip by each individual member to make notes on each problem he sees or impression he feels as an individual. Thirdly, the group again surveys the area, this time noting all the impressions of each individual.

Statistical data

Aside from what can be observed with the eye, there are usually available

for any area a number of statistics that will give a complete picture of conditions that exist, but which may not be apparent. Such data can be found on the history, climate, population, employment, finance (bank deposits) and other aspects of the area. One member of the planning commission can be assigned to the supervision of this data collection and, of course, should have the help of either a citizen committee or an assigned public employee, such as a draftsman, clerk or secretary.

II

STEPS IN MAKING THE RECONNAISSANCE

1. NATURAL AND MAN-MADE FEATURES

What to look at:

Geography (see plate A): unbuildable or hilly land; ponds, lakes or reservoirs; vacant buildable open areas; wooded areas; river or stream beds; floodable low lands; prevailing wind and weather characteristics, etc.

Land use: The general uses of land: i.e. agricultural, residential, business, industry, public, vacant, etc.

Man-made features (see plate B): sub-standard and isolated residences; school locations; flood-plain buildings; extent of business areas; location of major highways and railroads; non-conforming problem businesses and residences; airports and airfield locations; public buildings and park locations, etc.

What to analyze:

People: approximate numbers and distribution; crowding; sparsely populated areas; recent growth trends; past growth and locations.

Circulation: transportation facilities; where people work; how they come and go to work and to shop; parking problems; congested areas.

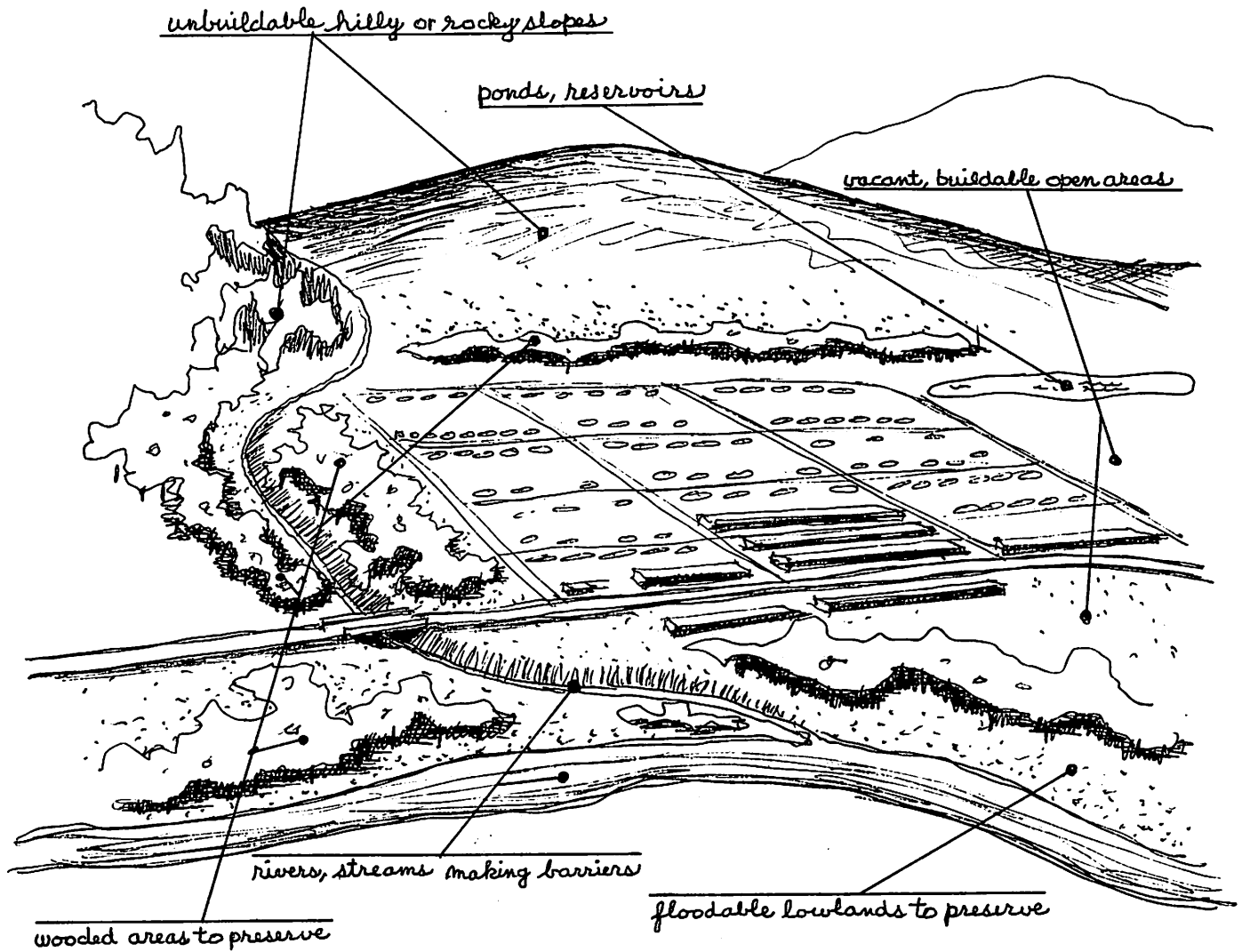
Changes: in growth patterns; in residential growth; blighted areas.

2. HOW THE AREA MAKES ITS LIVING

What to look for:

Major industries: number of employees; types of occupation; products manufactured; methods and location of distribution.

Other occupations and services: general types; number employed; income levels.



NATURAL FEATURES TO LOCATE AND MAP Plate A

What to analyze:

Industrial and business conditions: growing or receding?; new industries; business volume trends; bank deposits; new housing starts.

3. CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF LIVING

What to look at:

Adequacy of public and private institutions: schools, hospitals, libraries, museums, parks, churches.

Community organizations: service clubs; centers; social groups; churches.

Local government: administration; boards and agencies; buildings and adequacy.

Personality of area: traditions; spirit; aspirations.

4. PLANNING RESOURCES

What to look for:

Materials: maps; existing reports; statistics.

Information sources: local governmental agencies; business and labor associations; local newspapers; local educational institutions; libraries; utility corporations; state and federal agencies.

Individuals: industrial and business leaders; older citizens; local officials; educators and historians.

III

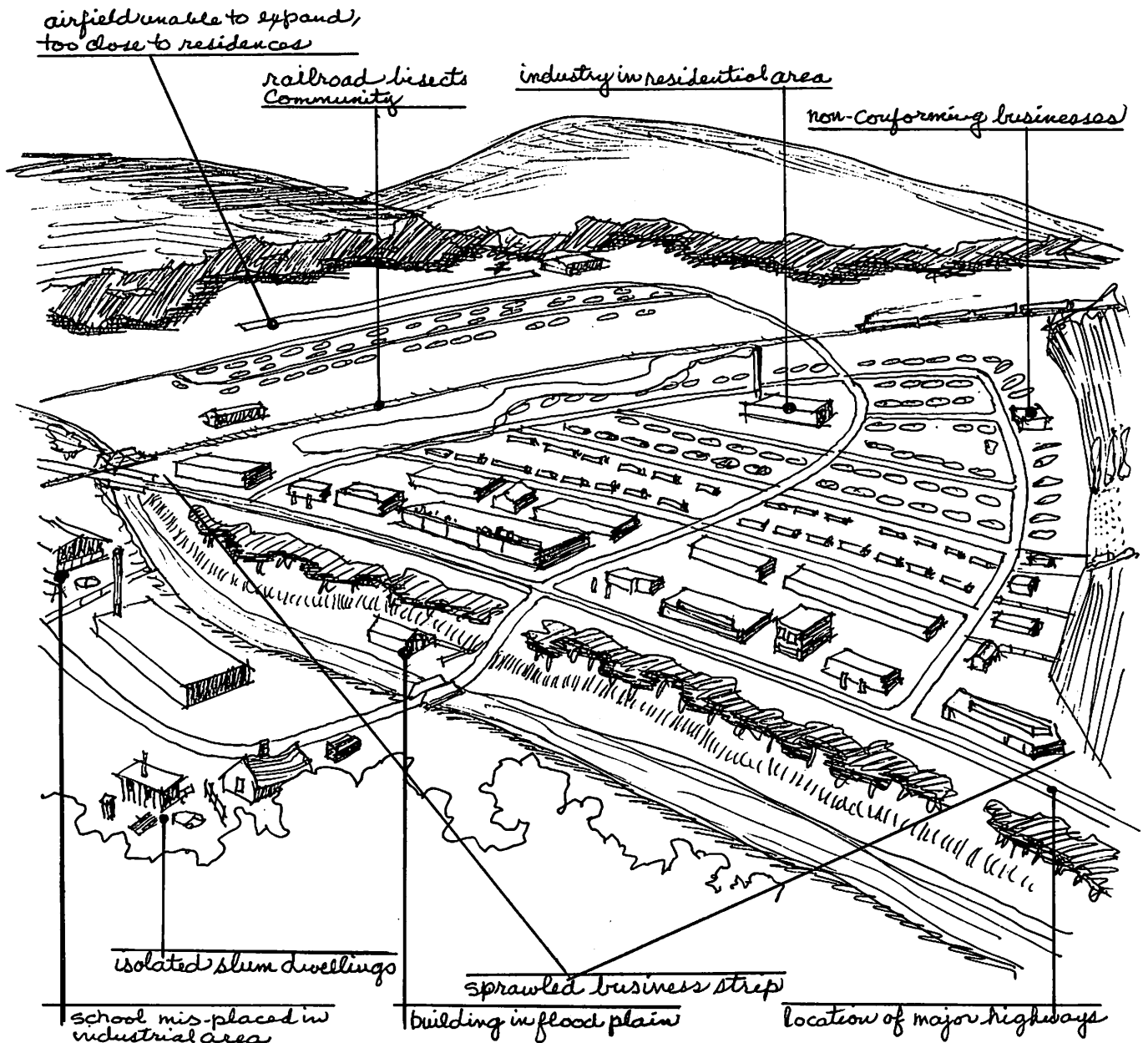
ANALYZING AND USING THE MATERIAL

A meeting of the commission is now held, and a fresh map marked with all the comments of all the members. This should give definite direction to the group as to where the greatest needs are, and as to which problems need immediate attention.

It should be the commission's duty at the same time the reconnaissance is being made, to solicit through the local newspaper any comment on area problems from local citizens. These should also be discussed and placed on the map. Other active community groups such as Chambers of Commerce, women's leagues, church groups, parent-teachers groups, etc., should all be requested to submit opinions as to problem areas, needed studies or foreseeable area needs.

From the chaos of all the collected material, order needs to proceed. The following suggested decision by the commission can be produced from the amassed data:

1. The tentative area of study. This should always include more than the area to be planned, even though in another political jurisdiction. A logical boundary outside of the immediate area should be chosen, following either a road, railroad, or section line.
2. General studies. There will now be apparent an indication of what general studies need to be made. Certain basic studies are more or less standard in all planning programs. These will be found in the Colorado Planning Notebook, bulletin P. 3., "Elements in the Community General Plan."



MAN-MADE FEATURES TO LOCATE AND MAP Plate B

3. Special studies. Areas may be found where more detailed studies should be made. These may be the central business area, floodable stream beds, substandard residential areas, fringe problem areas, or others. The areas requiring special studies should reveal themselves on the preliminary reconnaissance maps.
4. Emergency situations. Areas needing immediate action may show up in the reconnaissance. Such measures as temporary zoning or building restrictions may need to be enacted to delay further building until the plan can be drawn. The local Health Department may have to be solicited to enforce restrictions where unhealthy conditions exist.

5. Scheduling. Knowing what needs to be done, it is now possible to schedule the work. If services of a professional planner are to be contracted, now is the time to contact him and secure his help in the scheduling, since he will know in what order each part should be done and how much time to allot to each section. If no professional planner is to be hired to assist, then the planning services of the Colorado Division of Commerce and Development should be enlisted for a meeting to help in the determination of scheduling. Where Federal Aid is being used, scheduling will probably be done in one-year periods extending from two to four years.

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