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# Benefits of statewide land use plan

**Chester Smolski**

Providence has been a leader in the nation in combating air pollution since the early 1950s when local ordinances banned outside burning to prevent pollutants from spewing into the air.

These early efforts to clean the Providence air were in the right direction but the results were not immediately effective. Since the wind in this part of the country comes predominantly from the west, outdoor burning in communities, such as Cranston and Johnston, fouled the air over their own areas, and particulates carried by these winds also fell on Providence.

Air does not respect man-made political boundaries, and thus efforts to clean the air require that communities cooperate and that larger areas restrict outdoor burning in order that all may benefit. Today many more local communities subscribe to this thinking and have banned open burning. And certainly the general public approves as it becomes increasingly sophisticated in its knowledge of the nuisance and harm which results from foul air.

Water is another example of the need for community cooperation and regional thinking. The Providence water system, one of the finest in the country in terms of quality, low price, and adequacy, is not only for city residents. Close to one-half of all Rhode Islanders get their water from this single source, including six of the communities surrounding Providence. The most recent addition to the system was East Providence in 1970 because its own supply was both inadequate and foul tasting.

How can we clean our rivers when one

community bans the dumping of sewage and industrial waste while another community upstream continues such dumping? Providence cannot have a clean Woonasquatucket or Seekonk River if communities to the north continue to dump their wastes into these rivers. Communities now recognize this, and are working together to resolve the problem. Only with such cooperation, and by taking a larger regional view will we again have clean water in our rivers.

The constantly shifting air and water problems require this cooperative and

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regional effort, but what about pollution within localities. Does it belong only to those communities?

Siting a town dump on the edge of one community next to the residential development of another is poor planning and the people living close by are painfully aware of it. Building a shopping mall or industrial park on the border of a municipality thereby generating excessive traffic in the

adjoining municipality is poor planning and illustrates, again, the result of piecemeal approaches to land development problems that are all too common in this state.

It is only by historical accident that this small area of ours is one of the 50 states. If the New England region had been settled in the mid 1800s, Rhode Island well might have become one of the more than 3,000 counties of this country — the average size of which is about the same as Rhode Island. And if we were a county rather than a state then most likely there would be a land use plan for the county in which specific activities, such as residential, commercial, open space, and the like, would be more orderly.

Planning at the county level is more common in the West and South than in New England. Florida and South Carolina, for instance, have done this effectively.

For the third successive year, a bill before the Rhode Island General Assembly proposes a systematic and orderly use of the land in this state (county) of ours. Bill 77-H 6299 (Substitute "A") would establish a state-local land management program whereby all communities would prepare plans for the management of land development and, working closely with state planners, provide an integrated approach to the statewide use of the land.

This bill has undergone many changes and compromises as a result of scores of public meetings and discussions held in the state over the past three years. The measure now provides for the orderly development of our land, using a regional approach and invites greater cooperation among communities. It is a good bill, and should be passed.

*Chester E. Smolski is Director of Urban Studies, Rhode Island College.*