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Building Rural Local Officials' Capacity: "Circuit Rider" and Technical Assistance Programming

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public administration literature of the past decade describes a growing need for technical assistance to rural local officials and the strengths and weaknesses of past efforts to meet the need. In this paper, I describe the experience of the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill in evolving a network of "circuit riders" serving over 50 municipalities, backed by a regional technical assistance service. Each "circuit rider" makes the rounds of an assigned group of municipalities, identifying information needed for making decisions and solving problems. The "circuit rider" either provides the help directly or connects with expertise or other resources.

I then extrapolate this experience to propose a program for small communities in New York State that would augment the existing state assistance services to local government.

The proposal, offered for discussion and refinement, has the following main elements:

1. Establish a division (or office) to provide technical assistance of all kinds to local officials of small communities. This division would be charged with organizing and supporting a network of "circuit riding" technical assistance services. It would also provide expert backup support to these field offices (a function filled today by the Local Government and Community Services Division of the N.Y.S. Department of State).

2. The division should probably not build its own network of state employees to "ride the circuit." Instead the state could provide partial support to groups of communities, counties, or groups of counties to establish independent "offices of town and village assistance."

I estimate that after a testing period, requiring on the order of two million dollars annually to develop additional trial Offices of Town and Village Assistance, the program could be gradually scaled up to cover most of New York's 1100 small municipalities at an annual cost of about eight million dollars. Ultimately this would result in a 20-fold scale-up of the local assistance portion of the Tug Hill program. More specifically it would involve 100-120 circuit riders handling over 10,000 informational requests. Fortunately, we are in an era when the communications and information technology exists to service a network of this type and size.

If properly developed and nurtured, I believe the Tug Hill experience demonstrates that such decentralized helping programs would prove immensely popular -- a departure from the response to some recent state laws. Based on the state's continuing addition and upgrading of requirements imposed on local governments, the deterioration of the infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and waste disposal systems, etc.), and the decline of federal, and perhaps state financial assistance, it is my impression that the need in New York State for a program of this sort is urgent.

OVERVIEW

There is growing recognition in the literature of the last decade that rural local government is being left behind and sorely needs help. (1,2) City government has full time employees and has usually been able to evolve to match the growing complexity of both society and the political system. On the other hand, rural local officials are mostly part time people with other full time jobs. Their pay is usually in the lower four figures for twenty hours a week or more of effort. It's no wonder then that small communities are found to lack the ability to foresee potential problems and take preventive action. (1,2) They are often crisis oriented because their elected officials can just barely keep up, let alone look ahead. And when they do foresee problems they often do not know where to turn for needed information and consulting help.

Commitment by state governments to providing technical assistance to local governments has had its ups and downs over the past twenty years. Fueled by Federal money (e.g., HUD 701 and I.P.A.) attempts to organize a field network and support staff to aid local government have sometimes been elaborate. Sometimes these state level local assistance agencies have proven unstable, experiencing cutback and reorganization with change in administration. Based on my own experience working in the 39-town rural Tug Hill area (lying between the cities of Syracuse and Utica/Rome on the south and Watertown on the north) I believe that the level and nature of existing programs to enhance the capacity of small local governments has become insufficient to meet the need. In New York State we have the Division of Local Government and Community Services within the Department of State, a cadre of highly competent dedicated experts in local government matters. This unit serves very effectively as a resource that is tapped through training, publications, and conferences. Division staff conduct model studies that can be used by others — in a mode that will enable local officials to carry on after the experts leave. What they can't provide is a regular direct link with local officials, so help can be provided on day-to-day problems or long-term continuing efforts. I have some evidence, and this conference may well provide more, that says that some other states are in a similar condition.

There have been some excitingly successful methods piloted here and there that demonstrate how to provide the missing link. These might well point the way for success when state political leaders decide it is time to approach the problem anew. In New York State that time may well be close at hand. The newly-formed Legislative Commission on State-Local Relations has pointed to the need for enhanced local assistance, particularly as it relates to fiscal matters. Both sides in the gubernatorial race have expressed concern. Mario Cuomo, the Democratic candidate for Governor, having served as N.Y.S. Secretary of State and then, while Lieutenant Governor, as chair of the state's Rural Affairs Council, has long been close to rural local government needs. The Republican candidate for Lieutenant Governor, Assembly Minority Leader James Emery, early this year commissioned a Cornell study that claims that state-local relations need improvement, citing the need to remove inappropriate orders and mandates, to increase technical assistance, and to consider state financial aid so that groups of communities can afford to hire circuit riders. (3) With both sides recognizing the problem, this may be a good time to examine and consider some new ideas.

According to Honadle, the term "capacity building" in domestic policy circles has been around since the early seventies. Ms. Honadle, in her annotated bibliography on the subject, defines it as "...improving the ability of local communities to deal with their problems. It means helping communities anticipate, influence, or direct change; attract and absorb resources; make decisions about policy; manage physical, human, and

informational resources; and evaluate the results of such activities." (4) Inherent in the literature on capacity building is an emphasis on small communities, where the need is greatest, on decentralized decision-making, and on helping local officials help themselves — a "bottom up" rather than the "top down" approach to federal/state relations with local government.

Ways of providing technical support to towns and counties have been around for a long time. The National Association of Towns and Townships has been in business since 1963 and the National Association of Counties since 1935. In 1959 New York and Alaska were the first to form state agencies on local or community affairs. By 1970, some 25 states had established such offices, and by 1978 virtually every state had done so. (6) The political history of such agencies has not been all peaches and cream, however. For example, in 1975, at the end of the Rockefeller era, newly elected Governor Carey abolished the Office of Local Government (OLG) and the Office of Planning Services (OPS), merging their functions into the Department of State and greatly cutting back field offices and staff. Since the OLG's 10 field representatives were political appointees who had a direct link to the governor, it is understandable why the structure might be dismantled after a party change. I have only praise for the existing Local Government and Community Services Division; it's an excellent unit doing what it can do best. But the changes over the years have, I feel, left it smaller than it should be and disconnected from the communities it was set up to serve.

Similar histories of rise and decline have occurred in other states. In 1980 Wisconsin's Department of Local Affairs and Development (DLAD), which had been formed in 1967, went out of existence and its functions merged with business development functions into a Department of Development. Again, it was a newly-elected Governor who applied the coup-de-grace. Hagensick and Rasmussen list factors which they feel contributed to DLAD's demise: (5)

1) Lack of clear and consistent operational mandates.

> "Since a primary function of DLAD was to serve as a middleman on federal grant programs targeted to local governments, its operations would necessarily be directly affected by the vagaries of federal policies and programs. In effect, DLAD's mandate was of the feds, by the state, for the locals. That can be and was an uncomfortable and inconsistent role."

2) Lack of effective clientele relationships.

> "DLAD's programmatic efforts were not likely to produce positive responses from local officials. Federal and state preferences in the 1960s and 1970s emphasized regional planning and other efforts to attain intergovernmental cooperation at local levels. In Wisconsin, many local politicians perceive these programs as ones which would undermine their control."

> "The very scope and diversity of the maze of local governments impeded the development of strong clientele relationships. With local units ranging from the city of Milwaukee to tiny rural hamlets, it would be difficult for an agency to find and maintain a common denominator of mutual interests."

3. Lack of indispensability.

> "DLAD... was unable to develop functions considered essential by either the state's political leadership or by local officials who could, in turn influence that leadership.
>
> "The absence of supporters underscored the assessment of a high-ranking gubernatorial aide that DLAD was a 'throwaway' department."

In spite of the erratic organizational history of state programs to assist local government, a number of approaches and techniques have proven effective. The idea of shared experts and circuit riding town managers has been around at least since the 60's. By 1975 interest had grown to the extent that a two-and-one-half day workshop held in Tennessee drew over 80 people from more than 20 states. (1)

The circuit riding or shared town manager has been glamorized by the newspapers in recent years but the concept seems too narrow to be effective as a general strategy for improving local government capabilities. Rather we will speak here of the circuit rider as one who makes a personal and regular connection with leaders of a group of communities in order to provide information and connect with resources needed to solve problems and make decisions. This person is concerned with building capacity rather than taking over the job of management.

Launching from this overview I would now like to tell a bit about my own experience with a successful state sponsored program in a specific rural area.

CIRCUIT RIDING THE TUG HILL AREA OF N.Y. STATE

In 1973, when special area commissions were in vogue in New York State, the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill was formed. The origin of this one was different from the rest, however. Others in the Adirondacks, the Catskills, and the Hudson River Valley were formed because of strong statewide interests in those areas. These interests sometimes carried with them expectations and hence agendas on the part of people living outside the area that were not necessarily shared by residents. The Tug Hill area, 2,000 square miles in parts of four counties, was generally unknown when the Tug Hill Commission was formed. Tucked in between Lake Ontario on the west, and overshadowed by the State-protected Adirondack Park area on the east, the Commission was created due to concerns of local people and had no broad outside constituency. All nine Commission members were local residents and served as volunteers (legislation did not provide stipends). The stimulus for its formation was a developer's option to buy a large portion of the wilderness core of Tug Hill, perceived by local residents as a threat that would cause undesirable change.

When the Commission members first met in April, 1973, they decided that they were most interested in seeing what the local people wanted the future of the area to be. I was hired as Executive Director, not on the basis of an natural resource or planning background, but because of my eight years service with an organization called VITA, Volunteers in Technical Assistance. This organization had been formed to use volunteers to deliver technical assistance to community projects, first in less-developed countries, then, later, in urban and rural areas of the U.S. during the War on Poverty years. The first thing I was told to do was to find a way to meet with people of the area to see what they wanted the future to be. With advice from Cooperative Extension, Cornell, and their Community Resource Development people, four steering committees were

formed to help plan a series of public forums. These committees were composed mostly of local officials. The public came out in droves to the eight forums and told the Commission that they were concerned about the future, but that they did not want the State to plan for the area. Rather they would do it themselves.

The findings of the Commission, published in early 1976, called for local cooperative planning boards — one of which had already been formed and tested — with all power remaining at the individual town level. The Commission would provide planning assistance with no strings attached. Another recommendation in the report that already had had a brief testing was the formation of a technical assistance service that would solve problems for town and village officials as requested. (6)

This was the beginning of a program which today reports the following progress in a recent annual report to the Governor and the Legislature: (7)

- Four cooperative planning boards and one council of governments, with membership ranging from three to 18 municipalities, each served by a part-time or full-time circuit rider. (Note: Two of these "circuit riders" were initially made possible through federal IPA (Intergovernmental Personnel Act) funds administered by the N.Y.S. Department of State.)

- Out of 39 towns and 20 villages in the Tug Hill study area, only eight towns and nine villages have not yet been involved with land use planning programs. In the eleven-town Cooperative Tug Hill Planning Board, a circuit rider provides regular backup support to five enforcement officers covering seven communities.

- In addition to the technical assistance delivered directly by circuit riders, the commission's central technical assistance service since January has received (usually through the circuit riders) and processed requests at an annual rate of 525. These requests range from simple questions on the law, such as, "Can we merge the positions of town clerk and town tax collector? If so, how?" to time-consuming requests such as the two-year effort to assist the Town of Martinsburg in the face of a potential Health Department fine for sub-standard water. The culmination came this year with a FmHA grant/loan totalling $370,000 for a new water system.

- Four papers prepared on frequently-requested subjects/major issues. Example: New York State Uniform Fire Code Law: Simplified Alternatives with Pros and Cons.

- Fourteen training sessions held during the last six months attended by a total of 195 town supervisors, councilmen, highway superintendents, and planning board members. Sample subjects: simplified double-entry accounting, town budgeting, investment pooling.

- Lowville town and village merged their planning boards, zoning boards of appeals, and will be served by a common enforcement officer. All local land use laws are being reviewed and revised with the help of commission assistance.

- Organized an eleven-member committee (four from county, six from towns, one from a village) to oversee a Lewis County highway study to search

for methods of reducing highway costs and improving services through intermunicipal cooperation.

- Aided Jefferson County Planning Department in carrying out a multi-town historic survey (through state Historic Preservation office grant).

- Three school classroom exercises aided by Tug Hill staff.

- Education program plan developed for the "Tug Hill Aquifer," a critical underground water supply serving three counties. The Salmon Rivers Cooperative Planning Board/Conservation Advisory Council, assisted by their circuit rider, will coördinate the citizen education effort and the management strategy discussions.

- Circuit riders polled supervisors on issues of concern for Assembly Rural Task Force Conference. Involvement with four conference panels and much additional interaction with state policy makers.

- Continuation of a two-year program to conduct energy surveys of municipal buildings on request. As of 10/1/82, 53 such surveys had been conducted and written and verbal reports presented to governing boards. An evaluation study shows that approximately 60% of the survey recommendations have been followed with substantial cost savings.

- New pilot project on cash management begun in August. Three municipalities surveyed at their request by the Financial Management Center, SUNY - Albany. Results will determine whether or not the project should be extended to other communities.

In addition the commission conducts research projects on questions, needs and issues that affect the area as a whole. Subjects being covered at this time include new opportunities in agriculture, a survey of feelings about the acid rain issue, and a look at the economic and environmental aspects of several new approaches to forest harvesting.

In 1981 two books by authors not connected with the commission were published on the Tug Hill work. **Cooperative Rural Planning: a Tug Hill Case Study**, by Marsh, includes chapters on the commission's technical assistance service and the work of one of the cooperative boards' circuit riders. (8) **The Tug Hill Program: a Regional Planning Option for Rural Areas**, Dyballa, Raymond, and Hahn, Syracuse University Press, describes the Tug Hill program as a whole and evaluates its effectiveness - mainly from a land use planning perspective. (9)

The acid test came in April, 1981, the date the commission had set for a decision on whether or not the work of the temporary state commission should be continued or terminate. Cooperative Extension, Cornell, was asked to conduct workshops for local leaders, without the commission staff present, in order to determine how they felt about the commission's past performance, whether or not the work should continue, and if so what form it should take. One hundred twenty-five participants gave their verbal opinions in small group sessions and then filled out private questionnaires. Over 90% of all those present felt that programs should continue, and that all the elements of the program that had evolved were important to their communities and the area as a whole. (10) A 36-member steering committee was then appointed to make specific recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature. The result was that in the

summer of 1981, Governor Hugh Carey, who had at first opposed all independent authorities and commissions, proposed legislation to extend the program for five years. Led by local state legislators, the bill passed with few dissenters. This experience is in sharp contrast to the fate of some of the state-level local-government-service agencies like DLAD in Wisconsin. There is not room here to describe what I think it takes to set up effective circuit rider/technical assistance programs, but there are are some good references on the subject. (11,12) I will make just a few comments on more subtle ingredients.

1. The person hired for circuit rider or technical assistance work is all-important. That person must be someone who is willing to enable others to make decisions or take action, rather than doing it himself. That person must be able to deliver the goods, not necessarily providing the information directly but having the pursuit and persistence to see that information needed is obtained and delivered. The person must like working with people; establishing rapport and confidence is all-important if town officials are to make themselves vulnerable by showing where they need help. Like being a physician, a person must be willing to work any time of day. Visits are most frequently made in the evening. This is a drawback, but on the other hand, a circuit rider, like a field salesman, can, to an extent, set his or her own schedule.

2. The circuit rider needs technical support from other sources. The technical assistance service located at the Tug Hill office fills this role. In turn, the technical assistance office finds it very important to turn to other resources with more specialized knowledge. People in the State's Division of Local Government and Community Services have been invaluable, as have selected individuals in other state agencies.

3. A system is needed to log in and file for future access each technical assistance request and response. Built into the system should be a procedure for keeping track of how the problem solving or information gathering effort is proceeding, so that follow-up will be triggered as needed. Access to past efforts is important, since many times similar requests will come from different communities.

4. A circuit rider needs someone to talk to about the job; it can be lonely out there! For this reason, our commission has set up a team for each sub-area program. Each team meets on a regular basis to discuss problems in the field and how to overcome them. The job description for one of the commission's circuit rider positions is attached, as is a sampling from the commission's Technical Assistance Log.

Notice that the commission's "capacity building" efforts are not just directed at building management skills. Just as important is the regular provision of information, sometimes with analysis, sometimes with training in its use. This kind of personal, reliable resource is vital if part-time officials are to make informed decisions. The response to commission programs has demonstrated, then, a long-term continuing need for circuit riders who connect with a variety of technical assistance services and other resources. I like the statement of Anthony Brown which calls for a different approach to local government support (13):

> "Capacity building differs from the traditional technical assistance approach in several ways. In the first place, it requires a continuing and intimate relationship between the source of assistance and the recipient. This contrasts

with the more ad hoc, periodic, and formal character of the traditional approach. In the second place, a broader community-wide perspective rather than a narrow problem perspective is required in approach to the community problems. In the third place, capacity building places as much emphasis on teaching and education as on doing and helping the community solve its problems. Finally, in the fourth place, this approach involves a greater degree of risk-taking and investment of resources in low-visibility, 'soft' programs by the technical assistance agency, than is presently required under the traditional approach."

A PROPOSAL TO APPLY THE TUG HILL EXPERIENCE MORE WIDELY IN NEW YORK STATE

The literature of the last decade describes a growing need for technical assistance to rural local officials and the strengths and weaknesses of past efforts to meet the need. The experience of the Tug Hill Commission confirms that need in rural New York State and identifies some new elements that could be added to augment the state services that exist today. Based on the state's continuing addition and upgrading of requirements imposed on local governments, the deterioration of the infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and waste disposal systems, etc.), and the decline of federal, and perhaps state financial assistance, it is my impression that the need in New York State is urgent. A primary new ingredient needed is the "circuit rider," the personal link between the communities and the information, training, and consulting resources (and often the very resource itself).

In order to start discussion, let me propose what I think is a workable, affordable way for a state to enhance its capacity-building program for rural local governments:

1. Within a local-government-service oriented department establish a separate division (or office) to provide assistance to small communities. This unit would be charged with building and supporting a network of "circuit riders" to serve groups of small communities. It would also be able to connect the circuit riders with all kinds of backup assistance, e.g., fiscal, planning, and legal. (In the past, planning has sometimes been considered a function separate from other local assistance programs. But land planning is just one of many functions of municipal management. And though planning assistance usually requires longer commitments than other kinds of help, one of the key ingredients to a successful local planning program is the ability to deal with the variety of problems which often are immediately plaguing a local government.) The division should have no responsibilities for statewide policy functions. Local government assistance must be thoroughly service-oriented and, thus, it should be free to advocate the local government or rural viewpoint. Functions such as state planning must, on the other hand, advocate statewide interests. The two conflict and should not be combined.

2. The division should probably not build its own network of state employees to "ride the circuit." Rather, I propose that the state provide partial support to groups of communities, counties or groups of counties so that they may establish "offices of town and village assistance." Another way would be to scale up the Tug Hill approach by financing a network of independent state commissions which would be governed by boards of appointed volunteers who live in the areas served. The disadvantage of this approach, however, is that it sets up additional

governmental structures that might seem threatening to existing ones. When possible, utilizing existing structures is probably best.

The state level division or office would, then, need to include a section that would help organize, start up, and finance local assistance programs, and another section that would provide expert technical backup to the field offices (the latter function currently served by the Local Government and Community Services Division in the N.Y.S. Department of State). The need for central support services would increase considerably with the new field outreach. Potential new low-cost assistance resources could be explored, such as released time for underutilized state employees in other departments or skilled people from the business sector.

3. The state would provide a share of the financing for these local, independent or quasi-independent technical assistance organizations. The Tug Hill Commission has tested several approaches to financing the circuit rider function and has found that small communities by themselves cannot afford to finance the kind of services needed. For example, the Northern Oneida County Council of Governments collects $200 from each of its 18 municipalities, the county contributes $7500, and the commission finances the rest — approximately two-thirds of a budget of about $30,000 annually. The amount of local contribution per municipality to circuit rider program budgets in Tug Hill has ranged from a low of $200 (where there is also a county contribution) to as high as $1,500. The amount depends somewhat on size of the municipal budget. Why should the state provide, say, two-thirds of the funding of a local assistance program? First, the state gives the power to govern to local communities in the first place. It then requires that communities conduct their business according to certain standards. A perfect example of this is the State Environmental Quality Review Act which requires all governments to supervise an environmental impact review for a wide variety of projects or decisions.

Elizabeth Marsh brings in a second point of view:

> "What the circuit rider does is raise the capabilities of very small governments to a point where they can begin to compete on equal terms with larger cities and towns. Otherwise, without technical help, tiny, underfunded municipalities administered by harried people working part time, are outside of the possibilities for grants or the influence enjoyed by every other place. When that happens is that these small communities seem not to exist. They may believe that they have control, but in reality they are powerless. An investment with county or state funds in technical assistance and in the person-to-person help of a circuit rider is a small price to pay for equal opportunity for small places. The advocates for rural America should lobby for such services."

Let me be more specific for my own state. New York State, contrary to popular impressions, has the nation's third largest rural population (source: N.Y.S. Rural Affairs Council). It is a state of small governments, with 931 towns and 554 villages. Of these, 1130 have population totals under 5000 (source: N.Y.S. Office of the State Comptroller).

I estimate that after a testing period, requiring on the order of two million dollars annually to develop additional trial Offices of Town and Village Assistance, the program could be scaled up to cover most small communities for a total of about eight

million dollars. Programs such as this should be started on a pilot basis, evaluated, and, based on experience, be extended to additional areas on request. Ultimately this would result in a 20-fold scale-up of the local assistance portion of the Tug Hill program. More specifically it would involve 100-120 circuit riders handling over 10,000 informational requests. Fortunately, we are in an era when the communications and information technology exists to service this size and type of network program.

There are already some counties and multicounty planning boards who, on their own, are testing or considering programs something like this:

- Oneida County has a Farmers' Home Administration grant to test such a program in the southern part of the county, not served by the Tug Hill Commission.

- Chautauqua County has commissioned a consultant to propose a new role for the county in wholesaling services to its constituent communities and is planning on meetings around the countryside to discuss possibilities.

- The Intergovernmental Council of Southeast Steuben County, aided by planning and technical support from the Three Rivers Development Foundation (which is, in turn, partially financed by Corning-based private interests), has been operating successfully since 1978.

- The Local Government Program at Cornell University has been preparing training materials and conducting studies for years. A 1978 study funded by an IPA grant ably demonstrated the need for increased financial management training for small local governments. (14)

- Further interest may be stimulated by a round of traveling meetings scheduled by the newly formed Legislative Commission on State-Local Relations.

An approach along these lines is being tried on a very small scale in the State of Oklahoma. Municipal councils are voluntarily established and apply to the Community Affairs Division of the Department of Economic and Community Affairs for a declining grant. The first year grant involves 80% state funding; by the third year, this has dropped to 50%. At mid-1981, there were four such councils in Oklahoma, involving 21 communities. (15)

What I have proposed here, for discussion purposes, is an approach to state programming that I believe can succeed in building local government capabilities to the net benefit of the taxpayer. In addition, the approach if implemented properly should be able to gain and retain constituent support, insulating it somewhat from political change at the top. More information on experience in other states should be gathered and a program tested and gradually evolved. Among the important basic principles that must be followed is that local assistance must be thoroughly responsive and separated from state level agendas. Its leadership must have faith that, given information and dialogue, more effective and efficient local government will usually result.

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TEMPORARY STATE COMMISSION ON TUG HILL

A CROSS-SECTION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

FROM TUG HILL COMMUNITIES

1363 — Pinckney — Fire Code Reporting Forms
1364 — Remsen — Road Dedication
1365 — Western — Energy Survey
1366 — CTHPB — Vacancy in Office
1367 — Pinckney — Deputy Supervisor
1368 — NOCCOG — Town Constable
1369 — NOCCOG — Abolishing Appointed Position
1370 — NOCCOG — Special Process
1371 — THC — Freedom of Information, re: Town Records
1372 — Lorraine — Advertising Capital Note
1373 — Adams — Unsafe Buildings, Enforcement
1374 — Jeff. Co. Planning — Development Code Enabling Legislation
1375 — NOCCOG — Fire Code Legislation
1376 — Hastings — Solid Waste Junkyard
1377 — Adams — Agricultural District
1378 — JCSCPB — Agricultural District
1379 — Jeff. Co. Planning — Rural Development Code Adoption
1380 — Montague — Conflict of Interest (family relationships)
1381 — THC — Fire Code, re: Villages
1382 — Adams — Snowmobile Trail, funding/liability
1383 — Hastings — Local Audit Report
1384 — Orwell — Changing the Size of a Planning Board
1385 — Williamstown — Appointing CAC Member
1386 — West Monroe — Taping Town Board Meetings
1387 — Hastings — State Planning/Zoning Law
1388 — Hastings — Part-time Dog Control Officer
1389 — Hastings — Dog Control Quarantine
1390 — Orwell — Fire Code Information
1391 — West Monroe — Town Park Funds
1392 — Hastings — Dog Control Costs
1393 — Altmar — Disposal of Village Records
1394 — North Shore/Salmon Rivers — Fire Code, re: Public Assembly
1395 — North Shore/Salmon Rivers — Fire Code, re: Public Assembly Records
1396 — Orwell — Secondary Road Guardrails
1397 — Albion — Petroleum Storage Tank Regulations

JOB DESCRIPTION

TITLE: Local Government Advisor (LGA), Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG)[1]

REPORTS TO: Director, Community Assistance, and Chair, NOCCOG

DUTIES:[2]

1. Communication with Local Officials
   - A. Initiate contacts with local town and village elected officials and their planning boards.
     - (1) to make them aware of services available to them.
     - (2) to enable the LGA to develop programs and services to meet their needs.
     - (3) to pass on information to neighboring communities that is of interest to the NOCCOG communities and to the Tug Hill Commission Staff.
     - (4) to enable the Local Government Advisor to identify training and citizen education needs so that appropriate programs can be developed.
   - B. Coordinate plans and information with Oneida County Planning Department as requested by the Director of Community Assistance, THC.
2. Provision of planning and Land Use services to town and village Planning Boards. Examples of types of work include:
   - Presentation of alternative solutions to management, and fiscal problems.
   - Development, explanation, and modification of proposed local laws, regulations, codes, and ordinances using existing models were relevant.

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1. It is anticipated that in the first several months the majority of the LGA's time will be spent in Item 1, with Items 2 and 3 ultimately amounting to approximately 70-80%.
2. The job descriptions for the five circuit rider positions in Tug Hill vary since each program has its own emphasis and, hence, detailed duties.

- Development of comprehensive plans in consultation with local planning officials as may be requested.

3. Provision of Technical Assistance to other local officials.
   - Provides answers in a timely manner to technical assistance questions put forward by local officials.
   - Assists local government in finding federal and state funding.
   - Provides other support activities which may be requested within the constraints of the Local Government Advisor's time and budget.
4. Administration and Supervision
   - Assists in organizing any meetings of the Executive Committee of NOCCOG.
   - The Local Government Advisor supervises and trains an assistant if and when such an individual is hired.

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Degree in planning, environmental studies, public administration, or related field.

2. One year's experience in providing planning and management assistance to local governments.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: The Commission seeks a highly motivated individual with planning and management skills who desires to provide services to local officials under conditions not normally found in public service. The position requires a person who is a self-starter, capable of working under minimal supervision, resourceful, understanding of the pace and needs of a rural community, and can relate to small groups. Candidate should expect to attend numerous evening meetings and should reside in Northern Oneida County/Tug Hill Area and work out of his or her home until an office is established.

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Editors' Notes

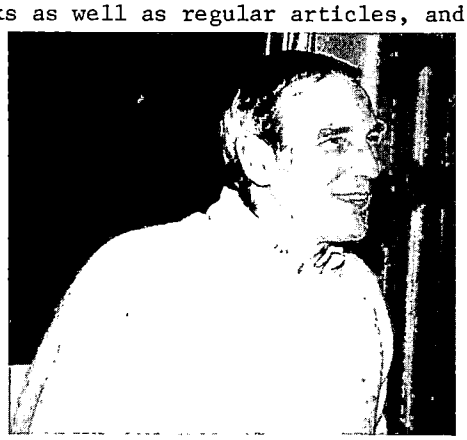
After two issues which focused on special topics -- Rural Planning last spring, and Public/Private Ventures this winter -- we decided to publish a "mixed bag" issue in hope of offering a wide range of topics to fit the wide range of interest represented by our readers.

Those who are interested in historic preservation will enjoy reading the Southern and Kaplan article dealing with the preservation of rural housing, and the Rowland piece describing New Bern's involvement with the Main Street program.

Several articles describe intriguing planning methods. Coe and Jones describe the use of circuit riding planners; Hollyer and Snaman discuss the uses of CDBGs; Furuseth, Ives, Stiftel and Burby give planners ideas on flood management; and Guffey and Barnes show how human services planning can improve local delivery systems.

Propst examines new legal issues related to aesthetics and land use control which may soon be affecting planners throughout the Southeast, and various planning techniques and theoretical concepts are discussed by Hively, Robinson, and Haak. Also included are our regular features of Book Reviews and In the Works.

We hope our readers enjoy the issue, and we encourage letters to the editors, contributions to In the Works as well as regular articles, and of course, new subscriptions.



carolina planning thanks

Dave Godschalk

for his guidance and support

over the past five years

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In the Works contributed by Julie McCullough, Matt Friedman, Ginny Faust, and the North Carolina Independent staff.

Front cover by Karen Barnes and Kathy Evers.

Thanks to Gene Payne and the Charlotte Observer for the cartoon on page 24, and to Jim Anders for the graphic on page 43.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO GINNY FAUST, WHO HAS DEDICATED TWO YEARS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE TO *carolina planning*

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Building Rural Officials' Capacity

Circuit Riders and Technical Assistance

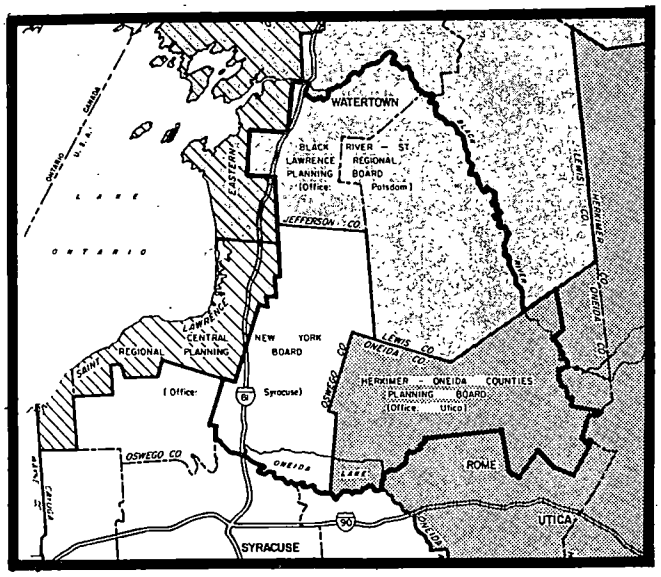
Recognition is growing in the literature of the last decade that rural local government is being left behind and sorely needs help. City government has full-time employees and has usually been able to evolve to match the growing complexity of both society and the political system. On the other hand, rural local officials are mostly part-time people with other full-time jobs. Their pay is usually in the lower four figures for twenty hours a week or more of effort. It's no wonder then that small communities are found to lack the ability to anticipate potential problems and take preventive action. They are often crisis oriented because their elected officials can just barely keep up, let alone look ahead. And when they do foresee problems they often do not know where to turn for needed information and consulting help.

Commitment by state governments to providing technical assistance to local governments has had its ups and downs over the past twenty years. Fueled by Federal money (e.g., HUD 701 and I.P.A.), attempts to organize a field network and support staff to aid local government have sometimes been elaborate. Sometimes these state level local assistance agencies have proven unstable, experiencing cutback and reorganization with change in administration. The level and nature of existing programs enhancing the capacity of small local governments has become insufficient to meet the need. In New York State the Division of Local Government and Community Services exists within the Department of State, a cadre of highly competent dedicated experts in local government matters. This unit

> THE LEVEL OF EXISTING PROGRAMS ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF SMALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAS BECOME INSUFFICIENT TO MEET THE NEED

serves very effectively as a resource that is tapped through training, publications, and conferences. Division staff conduct model studies that can be used by others in a way that will enable local officials to carry on after the experts leave. What they cannot provide is a regular direct link with local officials, so help can be provided on day-to-day problems or long-term continuing efforts. Other states are in a similar condition, but there have been some excitingly successful methods piloted here and there that demonstrate how to provide the missing link.

According to Honadle (1981) in Capacity-Building for Local Governments: An Annotated Bibliography, the term "capacity building" in domestic policy circles has been around since the early seventies. Honadle defines it as "..improving the ability of local communities to deal with their problems. It means helping communities anticipate, influence, or direct change; attract and absorb resources; make decisions about policy; manage physical, human, and informational resources; and evaluate the results of such activities." Inherent in the literature on capacity building is an emphasis on small communities, where the need is greatest, on decentralized decision-making, and on helping local officials help themselves -- a "bottom up" rather than the "top down" approach to federal/state relations with local government.



Regional planning boards serving the Tug Hill

Ways of providing technical support to towns and counties have been around for a long time. The National Association of Towns and Townships has been in business since 1963 and the National Association of Counties since 1935. In 1959 New York and Alaska were the first to form state agencies on local or community affairs. By 1970, some 25 states had established such offices, and by 1978 virtually every state had done so. For example, in 1975, newly-elec-

Benjamin P. Coe is the Executive Director of the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill in Watertown, New York.

ted Governor Carey abolished the Office of Local Government (OLG) and the Office of Planning Services (OPS), merging their functions into the Department of State and greatly cutting back field offices and representation.

Similar histories of rise and decline have occurred in other states. In 1980 Wisconsin's Department of Local Affairs and Development (DLAD) went out of existence, and its functions merged with business development into a Department of Development. Again, it was a newly-elected Governor who applied the coup-de-grace. Hagensick and Rasmussen, writing in the December 1981 National Civic Review, listed three factors which they feel contributed to DLAD's demise: lack of clear and consistent operational mandates, lack of effective clientele relationships, and lack of indispensability.

In spite of the erratic organizational history of state programs to assist local government, a number of approaches and techniques have proven effective. The idea of shared experts and circuit riding town managers has been around at least since the 1960's. By 1975, interest had grown to the extent that a two-and-one-half day workshop held in Tennessee drew over 80 people from more than 20 states. Today the circuit rider should be viewed as one who makes a personal and regular connection with leaders of a group of communities in order to provide information and resources needed to solve problems and make decisions. This person is concerned with building capacity rather than taking over the job of management.

Circuit Riding The Tug Hill Area of N.Y. State

In 1973, when special area commissions were in vogue in New York State, the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill was formed. Other state commissions in the Adirondacks, the Catskills, and the Hudson Valley were formed because of strong statewide interests in those areas. These interests sometimes carried with them expectations on the part of people living outside the area that were not necessarily shared by residents. The Tug Hill area, 2000 square miles in parts of four counties, was generally unknown when the Tug Hill Commission was formed. Tucked in between Lake Ontario on the west, and overshadowed by the Adirondack Park on the east, the commission was created due to concerns of local people and had no broad outside constituency. All nine commission members were local residents and served as volunteers. The stimulus for its formation was a developer's option to buy a large portion of the wilderness core of Tug Hill, perceived by local residents as a threat that would cause undesirable change.

When the commission members first met in April 1973, they decided that they were most interested in learning what future for the area was desired by local people. With advice from

AN INVESTMENT IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND IN PERSON-TO-PERSON HELP OF A CIRCUIT RIDER IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Cooperative Extension and Cornell's community resource development people, four steering committees composed mostly of local officials were formed to help plan a series of public forums. The public came out in droves to the eight forums and told the commission that they were concerned about the future, but that they did not want the state to plan for the area. Rather they would do it themselves.

The findings of the commission, published in early 1976, called for local cooperative planning boards, one of which had already been formed and tested, with all power remaining at the individual town level. The commission would provide planning assistance with no strings at-



Peaceful scene in the heart of the Tug Hill region

Riding the Southern Circuit

Ben Coe's description of circuit riders in upstate New York has its counterparts in the Southeast. Daniel Wanamaker, in a 1977 paper about circuit riders in the U.S. which was presented at the National Association of Regional Councils Conference, noted that the idea of using roving local government experts has been attempted in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia.

An informal survey of North Carolina public agencies indicates that technical assistance to local governments is not often provided by circuit riders. However, examples of persons who as Coe describes, "build the capacity" of local government officials to solve their communities' problems, are found within the state Office of Coastal Management and the Community Assistance Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development (NRCD), and among North Carolina's Councils of Government. Undoubtedly there are other examples.

John Crew is the land use plan coordinator for the state Office of Coastal Management (OCM). Working from his Washington, North Carolina office, he aids local officials in the state's 20 coastal counties in the development of land use plans required under the 1974 North Carolina Coastal Areas Management Act (CAMA). Crew is also involved with the current disaster planning effort of the OCM: he works with local governments to bring their disaster plans in line with current CAMA regulations.

The Division of Community Assistance of NRCD provides technical assistance to local governments through four major programs; the largest of which, both in terms of funding support and local governments served, is its community development technical assistance program. Under this program, any city or county needing assistance in land use, community development, or public management may contact a regional office of the Division of Community Assistance. Examples of services provided, free of charge, include preparation of zoning ordinances and subdivision

Susan Jones is a Masters candidate in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

tached. Formation of a technical assistance service that would solve problems for town and village officials as requested was also recommended.

This was the beginning of a program which today reports the following progress:

- Four cooperative planning boards and one council of governments, with membership ranging from three to 18 municipalities, each served by a part-time or full-time circuit rider.
- Of the 39 towns and 20 villages in the Tug Hill study area, only eight towns and nine villages have not yet been involved with land use planning programs. In the eleven-town Cooperative Tug Hill Planning Board, a circuit rider provides regular support to five enforcement officers covering seven communities.
- Training sessions attended by town supervisors, councilmen, highway superintendents, and planning board members on subjects such as simplified double-entry accounting, town budgeting, and investment pooling.
- Education program plan developed for the "Tug Hill Aquifer," a critical underground water supply serving three counties. The Salmon Rivers Cooperative Planning Board/Conservation Advisory Council, assisted by their circuit rider, will coordinate the citizen education effort and the management strategy discussions.

In addition the commission conducts research projects on questions, needs, and issues that affect the area as a whole. Subjects being covered at this time include new opportunities in agriculture, a survey of feelings about the acid rain issue, and a look at the economic and environmental aspects of several new approaches to forest harvesting.

The acid test of the Tug Hill program came in April 1981. Cooperative Extension at Cornell was asked to conduct workshops for local leaders, without the commission staff present, in order to determine how the leaders felt about the commission's past performance, whether or not the work should continue, and if so what form it should take. Over 90 percent of the 125 participants felt that programs should continue, and that all the elements of the program were important to their communities and the area as a whole. A 36-member steering committee was then appointed to make specific recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature. The result was that in the summer of 1981, Governor Hugh Carey proposed legislation to extend the program for five years. Led by local state legislators, the bill passed with few dissenters. This ex-

regulations, assistance to local officials in the development of budgets, and preparation of local grant applications.

In the past, regional staff were assigned specific portions of work weeks on a contractual basis to provide this technical assistance in local communities. Some of this work was done with HUD 701 funds. Today this is no longer technically a circuit rider program, as staff do not have the same constant personal contact with local government officials.

Executive Director Lindsay Cox of the Piedmont Triad Council of Governments notes that his COG has been providing technical assistance for nearly 10 years. Two years ago the staff tried the circuit rider approach for provision of this assistance, and staff services were contracted out an a daily or monthly basis. Piedmont Triad's circuit riding program was unique among the state's Councils of Governments, said Cox. The circuit riders attended meetings of local planning boards, revised ordinances, prepared annexation studies, evaluated city codes and charges for inspections, and made preliminary studies for Community Development Block Grant revitalization.

Despite this high level of activity, Cox noted that the circuit rider program "didn't work as well as we'd hoped", partially because the circuit rider requests came in spurts. Today Piedmont Triad COG still provides assistance to local planning boards, and staff members serve somewhat of a circuit riding function when they are requested to do so by local governments. This COG is currently preparing to contract with a local government to provide a circuit rider.

Although provision of technical assistance is widespread, the Western Piedmont COG in Hickory makes intensive use of this method of local government aid. Two of this COG's staff could be termed "circuit riding planners", according to Executive Director Doug Taylor. These people contract with five local governments for one or two days of services per week, such as annexation studies and transportation planning. The Western Piedmont COG remains one of the few that provide circuit riding planners. Taylor noted that other North Carolina COGs provide similar services, but not at the same level: 27 percent of Western Piedmont's current budget goes for such contracted services.

"We only provide circuit riding assistance if the city or county wants it, and doesn't want to hire full time staff," explained Taylor. Some of the communities this COG has serviced have recognized their increased effectiveness with greater technical assistance, and have gone on to hire their own full time planners.

perience is in sharp contrast to the fate of some of the state-level local government service agencies like DLAD in Wisconsin.

Some of the more subtle aspects of setting up effective circuit rider/technical assistance programs are noted below:

- The person hired for circuit rider or technical assistance work is all-important. That person must be one who is willing to enable others to make decisions or take action; must have the pursuit and persistence to see that information needed is obtained and delivered; and must like working with people and be willing to work any time of day.

- The circuit rider needs technical support from other sources. The technical assistance service located at the Tug Hill office fills this role. In turn, that office finds it very important to turn to other resources with more specialized knowledge.

- A circuit rider needs someone to talk to; it's lonely out there! For this reason, the Tug Hill Commission has set up a team for each sub-area program. Each team meets on a regular basis to discuss problems in the field and how to overcome them.

- A system is needed to log in and file for future access each technical assistance request and response. Access to past efforts is important, since many times similar requests will come from different communities.

The commissions's "capacity building" efforts are not just directed at building management skills. Just as important is the regular provision of information, sometimes with analysis, sometimes with training in its use. This kind of personal, reliable resource is vital if part-time officials are to make informed decisions. The response to commission programs has demonstrated a long term continuing need for circuit riders who utilize a variety of technical assistance services and other resources.

Anthony Brown, in the January/February 1980 Public Administration Review calls for a community-wide approach to local government capacity building rather than a problem-specific perspective, and a continuing and intimate relationship between the source of assistance and the recipient. Brown notes that education is as important as action in helping a community solve its problems, and that capacity building involves a greater degree of risk-taking and investment of resources in low-visibility, 'soft' programs by the technical assistance agency than is presently required under the traditional approach.

A Proposal to Apply the Tug Hill Experience More Widely

The literature of the last five or six years describes a growing need for technical assistance to rural local officials and the strengths and weaknesses of past efforts to meet the need. The experience of the Tug Hill Commission confirms that need in rural New York State and identifies some new elements that should be added to augment existing state services. A primary new ingredient is the circuit rider, the personal link between the communities and the information, training, and consulting resources. There is a workable, affordable way for a state to enhance its capacity building program for rural local governments:

1. Within a local government service department establish a separate division to provide assistance to small communities. Include a capability to connect with all kinds of assistance, including fiscal, planning, and legal assistance. Local government assistance must be service-oriented and, at times it should be an advocate for the local government or rural viewpoint. Functions such as state planning, on the other hand, must advocate statewide interests. The two conflict and should not be combined.

2. The division should not build its own network of state employees to "ride the circuit." Rather, the state should provide partial support to groups of communities, counties or groups of counties so that they may establish offices of town and village assistance. Another way would be to scale up the Tug Hill approach by financing a network of independent state commissions which would be governed by boards of appointed volunteers who live in the areas served. The disadvantage of this approach, however, is that it sets up additional governmental structures that might seem threatening to existing ones. The state level division or office would include a section that would help organize and finance local assistance programs, and another section that would provide strong technical backup from a central or regional office.

3. The state would provide a share of the financing for these local, independent or quasi-independent technical assistance organizations. The Tug Hill Commission has tested several approaches to financing the circuit rider function and has found that small communities by themselves cannot afford the kind of services needed. The amount of local contribution per municipality to circuit rider program budgets in Tug Hill has ranged from a low of $200 (where there is also a county contribution) to as high as $1500. The amount depends somewhat on size of the municipal budget.



Tug Hill Commission circuit rider confers about budget item with a town supervisor.

Elizabeth Marsh, in Cooperative Rural Planning: a Tug Hill Case Study, brings in a second point of view:

> "What the circuit rider does is raise the capabilities of very small governments to a point where they can begin to compete on equal terms with larger cities and towns... An investment with county or state funds in technical assistance and in the person-to-person help of a circuit rider is a small price to pay for equal opportunity for small places. The advocates for rural America should lobby for such services."

Conclusion

Part-time officials of small communities need technical assistance. Past failures and successes of technical assistance programs have been discussed in this paper. An approach to state programming has been proposed that may be able to build local government capabilities to the net benefit of the taxpayer. If properly implemented, this approach should be able to gain and retain constituent support, insulating it from political change at the top. More information from other states should be gathered in order to develop effective local assistance programs. Among the important principles to follow is that local assistance must be responsive, independent, and separated from state level agendas. Its leadership must have faith that, given information and dialogue, more effective and efficient local government will usually result.

This article is an excerpt from Coe's presentation to the 1982 Region I/II Conference of the American Society for Public Administration.