

Introduction

Back in November of 1988, Clifton's municipal council approved the city's participation in the Future Vision Project, sponsored by the International City Management Association (ICMA). The purpose of this project was to identify ways to track key trends impacting local governments, to select major issues facing a municipality, and to develop workable strategies to better plan for the future.

In order to develop sound projections and trends for the city, the resources of the Planning Association of North Jersey (based in Clifton) were called upon to assist the city in this future planning project. Key trends impacting the municipality were researched, documented, and projected for the coming decade. They included employment trends, business trends, housing trends, land use and zoning trends, and population trends. The facts upon which these projections were based were gathered from existing public documents available from the municipal, state, and federal governments.

The city's department managers were then asked to identify key trends and issues facing their respective service area for the 1990s. Each department manager was then asked to identify the single most important issue facing their department during the coming decade. The results of this research effort were subsequently assembled and published as the Future Vision Report: Projections, Trends, and Issues Facing Clifton in the 1990s. This report was designed to serve three general purposes.

One, to inform elected and appointed officials of the major projections, trends, and issues facing the city during the 1990s.

Two, to provide information to them as they make major decisions impacting the city's future.

Three, to serve as a starting point for future strategic planning efforts Clifton. Once an agreement has been reached on the major issues the city, the issues will be delegated to the appropriate city boards, commissions, and departments, to develop and implement successful strategies to deal with those major issues facing the municipality during the decade. The major projections and trends developed as a result of this plan-process, the key departmental issues identified by department managers, and the significant city-wide issues impacting Clifton in the future, are highlighted below.

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Projections and Trends

Employment Trends

- The composition of the city's workforce to white-collar, reflecting new jobs in service industries such as insurance, real estate, and finance.
- With the decline in manufacturing jobs, an increased number of citizens will have to seek employment outside the city in future years.
- There is an increasing number of females in the workforce. This will create a need for full-time child care for pre-school children, and before and after school programs for older children.
- The greater availability of public mass transit, and regional park-and-ride locations, will make it easier for citizen to work elsewhere in the future.

Business Trends

- The number of manufacturing jobs will continue to decline in the future. An additional 20 percent decline is expected by the year 2015.
- An increasing number of females in the workforce will place greater demands in the future for full-time childcare, and related domestic services.
- The greater number of females in the workforce will income families, creating additional family income and purchasing power per household.
- With more working families, additional services will be needed in the future to accommodate this trend, creating demands to expand services will be needed provided in the local economy.
- The local development community is increasingly being influenced by regional housing and financing trends.

Housing Trends

- The city has an aging housing stock. By the year 2000, 85 percent of the existing housing stock will be over 40 years old. The need for comprehensive code enforcement will increase in future years.
- Since the city is basically built-out residentially, there will be increased pressure for multiple-family dwelling units in the future, such as apartments, townhouses, and condominiums.
- The availability of affordable housing is decreasing, placing greater demands in the future for assistance to low and moderate income families.
- A high proportion of senior citizens will result in the turnover of the existing housing stock in the future to non-seniors. Smaller affordable residential units will let seniors remain in the city.
- Increased residential development pressures will place greater demands for "high-rise" type development . Stricter zoning standards may be needed in the future to maintain low-density development.

Land Use and Zoning Trends

- Older industrial zones are being changed to accommodate newer commercial and residential land uses. This trend will continue in the future.
- The city is primarily built-out, creating future residential development pressures to build on smaller sized lots and marginal properties.
- With increased development pressures, and a limited amount of available land, there will be a greater emphasis in the future on acquiring open space and recreational areas for the public.
- As pressure mounts to retrofit older industrial sites to more modern uses, additional creative development standards will be needed in the future.

Population Trends

- Almost all residentially zoned land in the city has been developed. This will place future restrictions on population growth in the future.
- Any significant population changes in the future will come from the expansion of existing household sizes (i.e., as "empty-nesters" are replaced by younger, growing families).
- While future population changes will be minor, they will reflect a greater number of younger children, placing greater demands on the public school system.
- The city can expect an increasing number of smaller households created by smaller family units and one person households.

Departmental Issues

Administration

- There will be fewer federal and state grants, leaving cities to solve their own problems and issues with local funding.
- Any new federal funds will be limited to programs that help achieve national goals, such as affordable housing, shelters for the homeless, etc.
- In order to decrease their reliance on the property tax, local governments will be forced to increase user fees and charges to cover their costs.
- The public, as well as special interest groups, will continue to demand more services, but be opposed to increased taxation.
- There will be a greater use of new technologies and labor-saving devices to help hold down operating costs.

Assessing

- The redevelopment of older industrial areas into residential uses will help bring in new rates and place more demands on existing public services.
- A possible increase in mortgage rates will have a dampening impact on the real estate market, creating a possible decline in future real estate values.
- Continuing property tax increases will have a negative impact on fixed income citizens. Some form of state-wide relief is needed for these taxpayers.
- More state laws are envisioned in the area of local assessment practices, further eroding the home rule powers of local governments.
- As county, municipal, and school budgets increase in the future, the number of appeals will escalate accordingly.

Community Development

- A greater emphasis will be placed on creating safer neighborhoods through the use of environmental design techniques, as opposed to hiring additional police officers.
- Both the number and funding for federal housing programs are decreasing, placing greater financial burden on cities to maintain these programs.
- The cost of complying with state and federal environmental laws will be passed along to consumers, adding to the already high cost of housing.
- The rezoning of industrial land to residential uses, due to escalating land values, will increasingly require residents to work outside of the city, placing additional burdens on existing roadways.
- As the housing stock continues to age, greater code enforcement demands will be placed on homeowners to maintain their properties.

Finance

- Regional job market conditions, and increasing unemployment, could have negative impact on the ability of taxpayers to absorb rising property taxes.
- The impact of state-mandated programs, without state reimbursement, will place a greater financial burden on existing municipal budgets.
- Infrastructure requirements are escalating and due to limited local funding may hamper the development of future properties, decreasing ratables.
- The use of high technology items, such as micro computers, will be required to hold down rising personnel costs.
- In order to save funds, local governments will increasingly pursue joint purchasing arrangements for common products and services.

Fire

- The number of fire incidents should decline due to new construction technologies, improved building codes, and more fire-safety inspections.
- Due to an aging population, fire personnel will increasingly become involved in ambulance and emergency medical services to better serve the community.
- The importance of hazardous waste planning and management will increase due to the escalating costs of disposing of such materials.
- As older industrial sites are redeveloped into multiple family dwelling units, this higher building density will impact services and the type of equipment used for fire suppression.
- Future budgetary constraints may require the consolidation of neighborhood fire stations and the reallocation of existing fire equipment.

Health

- State and federal funds for health services continue to decrease, placing a greater financial burden on local governments to perform these services.
- Higher levels of government continue to mandate health-related programs and services without reimbursement, which will raise municipal taxes.
- An aging population will create greater demands for more specialized health programs for senior citizens and disabled persons.
- Increased inter-department coordination will be needed to control the health programs created by the illegal dumping and spills of hazardous materials.
- Due to limited revenues, it may be necessary to contract out certain health services to the private sector, decreasing our control over these programs.

Legal

- The state and federal government continues to enact more laws and regulations impacting the affairs of local government.
- Because of the increase in the number of laws impacting cities, a greater amount of litigation can be expected.
- The field of municipal laws is becoming more specialized, which will require more advanced training in new areas of municipal law.
- Due to the complexity of labor agreements, and the greater number of labor-related cases and appeals, the workload in this area will increase.
- As society becomes more litigious in nature, a greater number of lawsuits can be expected against the city and its public officials.

Police

- In order to keep the city a safe place in which to live and work, more commercial areas and neighborhoods will request walking patrols.
- Due to the high cost of refuse disposal, increased litter and debris in public rights-of-way will require additional patrols to cite offenders.
- The computerization of police operations and records will reduce the need for additional clerical personnel in the future.

- In order to provide additional services, without more police officers, the department will have to acquire the latest police-related technology.
- Increases in the population, and more motor vehicles per household, will require additional traffic enforcement.

Public works

- There will be a greater deterioration of the public infrastructure without adequate grant funds and other revenue sources to perform this work
- The decrease in state and federal grants for infrastructure development will force cities to bond for these capital projects.
- The increase in refuse collection costs will require the city to explore other collection options, such as less frequent pickups and charging for other services.
- The "off-site" impacts of development will require new developer charges for such items as traffic control, and provisions for more sewer and water capacity.
- An increased Workload, without additional staffing, will require the greater use of new technologies and other labor-saving equipment.

Recreation

- The trend towards a shorter work week in the private sector will create more leisure time, placing greater demands on existing parks and recreational facilities.
- The redevelopment of older industrial areas to residential uses will create a greater demand for additional recreational and park services.
- There will be an expansion of independent sports leagues in the city, placing a heavier burden on existing public parks and ballfields.
- The increased use of microcomputers will help the department to better serve the public by facilitating course scheduling and ballfield assignments.
- Greater innovations and creative ideas will be required to maintain services due to limited grant and private sector funding sources.

City-Wide Issues

Municipal Revenues

- Decreasing revenues from higher levels of government, and citizen opposition to increased taxes, will require the increased use of user fees and charges in the future to help finance services.

Aging Population

- An aging population will require the future expansion of emergency medical and ambulance services. Modern building technologies, and stricter codes, should make time available to expand these services.

Older Industrial Areas

- The redevelopment of older industrial areas will increase the population and place greater demands on services in the future. New revenue sources, outside of raising property taxes, should be sought to finance these services.

Health Services

- State and federal funds for health services have been substantially reduced. New revenue sources must be acquired in order to maintain high quality health services to the public in the future.

Hazardous Wastes

- Due to the problem of disposing of hazardous wastes, a greater number of illegal spills and dumpings will occur in the future. A comprehensive Hazardous Materials Enforcement Program will be needed to mitigate this situation.

Juvenile Services

- Greater interdepartmental coordination will be needed in the future (e.g., police, fire, health, housing, and recreation) to help combat substance abuse and related juvenile social problems.

Public Infrastructure

- There will be a greater deterioration of the infrastructure in the future without adequate funding sources for needed improvements. New funding sources will be necessary for this purpose.

Parks and Playgrounds

- Parks and playgrounds are aging and will be in need of major renovations and repairs in the future. A master plan will be required to guide park and playground development and renovations.

The Future

Too often, government planning is reactive, short range, staff oriented, and dominated by a single (and typically organizational) issues. New thinking is needed in times of fewer grant programs, complex and interrelated issues, rising expectations regarding services, and a greater public aversion to increased taxation. A longer planning time frame will enable cities to optimize their human and financial resources. For these reasons, it is imperative that public officials provide a strategic vision for their community.

A shared understanding of issues and goals facing a community not only provides a vision of the future, but also helps mobilize all available resources to effectively manage change. One of the basic assumptions of any future planning effort is that the issues selected are unique to each individual community, and that ways to deal with these issues must be adapted to each community's local political environment and administrative structure. Such a community planning effort helps to restore the public's confidence in their local government - the level of government closest to the people.