

## *Chapter 5*

### THE TENACITY OF PAROCHIALISM: STATE PLANNING, 1929–1959

The desire to reform California's rural society dissipated after Elwood Mead left the Land Settlement Board and Simon Lubin resigned from the Commission on Immigration and Housing. State, regional, and county planning efforts of the 1930s and 1940s were recurrent and intertwining responses to New Deal legislation and World War II demands. Although California suffered severe tax problems during the 1930s, tax and land issues rarely meshed in policy discussions at the state level as they had in the 1870s and 1910s. Large landholdings were by now accepted as an integral part of California's agricultural industry. Also, the agricultural sector no longer needed further development; rather, farmers needed to be rescued from economic distress and farmland from physical exhaustion. More people competing for a livelihood on the land hardly seemed the appropriate solution, and calls for the breakup of land monopolies were thus stilled. Yet land-use planning was discussed often during this thirty-year period.

#### THE COUNTIES

Soil conservation was the principal agricultural land issue of the 1930s, but those concerned with soil conservation were content to propose

mechanical solutions for treating immediate environmental problems: terracing, contour plowing, or grassland waterways to slow or reverse the adverse physical effects of soil erosion. In response to the federal Soil Conservation Act of 1935, California, like most states, passed corresponding legislation. The Soil Conservation District Act of 1938 left district formation to the discretion of agricultural landowners, who were authorized to petition county boards of supervisors to initiate proceedings. The state, through a Soil Conservation Committee serving “without compensation, at the pleasure of the Governor,” would provide districts only with limited advice and technical assistance.<sup>1</sup> The Soil Conservation District Act thus endorsed the technical approach to agricultural land-use problems and upheld agricultural land-use planning as a function of local governments.

Other planning developments likewise elaborated the home rule principle. The 1929 Planning Act required all counties to establish planning commissions and required each commission to develop and adopt a “comprehensive, long-term, general plan” for physical development. But the Legislature did not clearly define what a general plan should encompass. Instead, it permitted such plans to include conservation, land use, recreation, and transportation-related elements. Nor did the Legislature lay down specific procedures and criteria for implementing and administering county general plans. Between 1929 and 1937 only twenty-seven counties complied with the law and established planning commissions. Lacking clear definition of planning functions and procedures, counties were slow to develop land-use (and other) plans and even slower to adopt implementing zoning ordinances.<sup>2</sup>

Major amendments to the Planning Act in 1937 both broadened the definition of a general (or master) plan specifically to include land use, conservation, and transportation elements and delineated criteria for land-use

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<sup>1</sup> *California Statutes*, 1938 (Extra Session), Chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> California Office of the Director of Planning and Research, *California Reports on Planning* (Sacramento, February 1948), 19–20. See also Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 199; William Spangle and Associates, Inc., “The Planning Law of California: An Analysis,” Report to California State Development Plan Program (Sacramento, 1965), 20–21. Before 1929, two local-level planning commissions were established in California: Los Angeles County formed its regional planning commission in 1925; San Francisco City and County formed a city planning commission in 1917.

and conservation plan elements. Under the 1937 amendments, county land-use plans were to be “an inventory and classification of natural land types and of existing land cover and uses, and comprehensive plans for the most desirable utilization of land.” Conservation plans were to guide “development and utilization of natural resources,” which included water, forests, soils, rivers, harbors, wild life, and minerals. In addition, conservation plans were to include “reclamation of land and waters” as well as “prevention, control and correction of the erosion of soils.” The legislative rhetoric fairly mimics the technical approach to soil conservation espoused by Hugh Bennett, chief of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, who stressed utilizing each acre of agricultural land according to its physical capabilities.<sup>3</sup> One can only conclude that the Legislature was responding to federal efforts to encourage agricultural land-use planning through voluntary, local-level soil conservation programs.

The 1937 Planning Act amendments, however, also gave county planning commissions and boards of supervisors a clear mandate for rural zoning. Cities and counties in California derive their power to zone from article XI, section 11, of the state Constitution, which reserves for local governmental units the right to control or supervise the property within their jurisdictions, but the 1917 Zoning Act set forth ordinance-implementing procedures for incorporated cities only. In 1925, Los Angeles County adopted a comprehensive zoning ordinance (the first county in the United States to do so) under the provisions of its home rule charter, which allowed the county to act independently. The 1937 amendments thus set forth, for the first time, procedures for adopting county zoning ordinances. These amendments, plus the 1938 Soil Conservation District Act, gave all county governments ample authority and adequate procedures to inaugurate

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<sup>3</sup> *California Statutes*, 1937, Chapter 665, especially Section 4. In his introduction to *Elements of Soil Conservation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947), Bennett wrote: “Economic stability grows from good soil used intelligently. Wise use of productive land means protecting the land from impoverishing influences while under cultivation or grazing so as to keep it permanently productive. . . . To do this, many farmers need the technical assistance of soil conservationists.” For a short, but excellent introduction to Bennett’s tireless efforts in the field of soil conservation, see Peter Farb, “Hugh Bennett: Messiah of the Soil,” *American Forests* 66 (January 1960): 39–42.

locally controlled land-use planning for rural areas.<sup>4</sup> Both complemented the policy framework set up by the 1929 Planning Act and established agricultural land-use planning as a county government function.

County planning commissions, however, tended to adopt zoning ordinances slowly, at best, and these were comprehensive only in the sense that they were loosely worded and, therefore, could be construed as all-encompassing. Santa Clara County, for example, adopted an “A-1,” or agricultural use, classification in the mid-1940s, but the ordinance, as written, permitted almost any land use. Farmer opposition, according to one source, prevented the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors from imposing a more restrictive zone. Between 1937 and 1947, when the State Conservation and Planning Act superseded the State Planning Act, twenty-four more counties established planning commissions, for a combined total of fifty-one of the state’s fifty-eight counties. Six counties had yet to comply with the law nearly twenty years after its adoption (San Francisco County is excluded since the city and county boundaries are contiguous). Of these fifty-one counties, only fifteen had adopted land-use plans, only one had adopted a conservation plan (Fresno County), and only twenty-six had adopted zoning ordinances.<sup>5</sup>

If county governments generally disregarded their responsibility to oversee rural land use during the 1930s and 1940s, the state compounded this neglect by failing to delegate clear lines of authority to local units. When the Legislature finally set up procedures for rural zoning in 1937, it followed the Planning Act amendments with the 1939 Uninhabited Territories Annexation Act, which gave cities priority over land-use decisions affecting rural-urban fringe areas. The future importance of the 1939 law was not immediately apparent, at least to county officials, but it eventually blocked county planning commissions and boards of supervisors from using the powers granted to them in 1937 when they were groping for legal

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<sup>4</sup> *California Statutes*, 1937, Chapter 665, Section 6.3: Ralph B. Wertheimer, “Constitutionality of Rural Zoning,” *California Law Review* 26 (January 1938): 179–180; Spangle, 21–22.

<sup>5</sup> *California Reports on Planning*, 19–20; for brief information on farmers’ role in the 1940s “A-1” ordinance, see George Goodrich Mader, “Planning for Agriculture in Urbanizing Areas: A Case Study of Santa Clara County, California” (M.C.P. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1956), 34.

measures to control urban sprawl in the post–World War II era. In any event, by 1947 the newly established State Office of the Director of Planning and Research concluded that California suffered from “land-use lethargy” — that “zoning ordinances [had] been enacted in nearly every case only after the need for zoning became an absolute necessity, not to the planning commission but to property owners wanting to protect their land values” and to government officials attempting to correct “past mistakes.”<sup>6</sup>

### THE STATE PLANNING BOARD, 1934–1943

While counties were slow to assume land-use planning responsibilities throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government seemed all too eager to impose planning programs upon states during the New Deal. The threat of federal dominance led California to assert its governmental priority in planning policy beginning in the late 1930s. Between September 1933 and December 1934, forty-two states established state planning boards at the request of the Roosevelt Administration via the U.S. Administrator of Public Works, Harold L. Ickes. These boards were necessary to help coordinate federal public works programs. The National Planning Board (attached to the Public Works Administration), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and later the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which superseded the CWA and FERA, funded much of the work carried out by state boards. As a result, state planning programs during the 1930s came to be known derogatorily as “research for relief’s sake,” revealing the stepchild status which state legislators and state government bureaucrats attached to these boards.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *California Reports on Planning*, 4. Observations by Richard S. Whitehead, member of the State Planning Board staff from 1937 to 1941 and Santa Barbara County planning director from then to 1969, corroborate the findings published in the 1948 report. According to Whitehead, Santa Barbara County commercial farmers consistently blocked the county’s attempts to establish an agricultural zone. It was not until after the Williamson Act passed in 1965 that the same farmers applied pressure for agricultural zoning so they could qualify for lower property taxes (interview with author, September 8, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> National Resources Committee [superseded the National Planning Board], *The Future of State Planning* (Washington, D.C., March 1938), 3; Dorothy C. Tompkins,

In California, Governor James Rolph (Republican) appointed an eleven-member State Planning Board in January 1934. The National Planning Board assigned L. Deming Tilton to the board as a planning consultant in June 1934.<sup>8</sup> Tilton began work on planning projects in October 1934 with the aid of about fifty FERA workers. In June 1935, the Legislature granted statutory authorization to the State Planning Board, establishing it as an agency under the Department of Finance, but the act carried no appropriation. The board was composed of five private citizens plus the directors of the state departments of finance, natural resources, and public works and had authority only “to cooperate” with organizations or other governmental units and agencies that might be “interested” in developing “the natural and economic resources of the State.”<sup>9</sup>

Governor Rolph died in office shortly after he appointed the State Planning Board, and while his successor, Frank Merriam,<sup>10</sup> made no attempt to dismantle the board, neither he nor the Legislature made any attempt to use it, even in its limited advisory capacity. By late 1936, the planning staff still had no permanent quarters and Tilton had little or no formal access to other state departments, which would have permitted him to coordinate agency planning activities. The State Planning Board relied entirely on federal funds to carry out its research until Democrat Culbert L. Olson was elected governor in 1937. Then, in 1938, the Legislature allocated the board a modest \$12,500, increased the amount gradually to \$20,970 in 1941, but decreased it to \$16,000 in 1942, the year Olson left office.<sup>11</sup>

Tilton, the guiding force behind the State Planning Board, took the agency’s research and fact-finding responsibilities seriously, even if

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*Recent Trends in State Planning and Development* (Berkeley: University of California Bureau of Public Administration, 1949), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Tilton received some of his early planning experience under Harland Bartholomew, in whose St. Louis office Tilton worked for a time, according to Richard S. Whitehead (September 8, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> *California Statutes*, 1935 (Extra Session, 1934), Chapter 331; National Resources Board, *State Planning: Review of Activities and Progress* (Washington, D.C., 1935), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Lt. Governor Frank Merriam became governor in June 1934 and was reelected in November 1934, defeating Democratic candidate Upton Sinclair.

<sup>11</sup> National Resources Committee, *State Planning: Programs and Accomplishments* (Washington, D.C., December 1936), 4, 100; National Resources Planning Board, *State Planning* (Washington, D.C., June 1942), vii.

Governor Merriam and the Legislature did not. With respect to land-use planning, he directed the planning staff in a major study of tax delinquent lands, part of a National Planning Board–initiated program to identify privately owned land of sub-marginal productive capabilities so that the federal government could purchase such lands to bring them under better management. Tilton’s investigation revealed that, during 1936–37, the state held, as a “conservative estimate,” tax deeds to at least 2,500,000 acres of land. Not all of this land was rural and/or agricultural land; large areas were abandoned, cut-over forest lands, and vast tracts were lands that had been granted to Southern Pacific. Much of this land was considered suitable for private agricultural development subject to water availability.<sup>12</sup>

The investigation prompted the State Planning Board to make several recommendations to Governor Merriam concerning tax assessment and administration. In addition, the board used the study to design a plan, also presented to the governor, to “classify” all tax delinquent land deeded to the state in order “to determine its best ultimate use and ownership.” Under the plan, federal, state, and local agencies would cooperate in classifying land. Upon completing that process, the state would turn over to counties or cities the deeds to land determined to be “suited for private ownership.” Deed restrictions, where necessary, would attempt to “prevent irrigation districts from over-capitalizing and including more land than they c[ould] supply with water” or might require the new owner to “conserve and stabilize water supplies and extend soil conservation practices for the protection and perpetuation of existing agricultural areas.”<sup>13</sup>

The State Planning Board’s study and plan for rehabilitation of tax delinquent lands did not result in any legislative action,<sup>14</sup> but it did provoke some interest from the Commonwealth Club, which studied the broad

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<sup>12</sup> See Otis L. Graham, Jr., *Toward a Planned Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 37–39, for information on the National Planning Board; Richard S. Whitehead (September 8, 1982) supplied information on Tilton’s role in the State Planning Board.

<sup>13</sup> California State Planning Board, “Tax Delinquent Land in California: A Review of the Problem and a Plan for its Solution,” TS report, December 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Article 2, Section 17 of the State Lands Commission Act (*California Statutes*, 1938 [Extra Session], Chapter 5) gave the commission authority to “classify any or all state land for its different, possible uses,” but Article 3, Section 31 of the same act stipulated that none of its provisions applied to “lands acquired by the state on sale thereof

topic of land-use planning throughout 1937 and 1938. When the club's Agriculture Section reported in 1938, it stated boldly that "programs for land classification, for land zoning, for government purchase of land and for the removal of the people from whole communities startle us." Clearly, this was not the Commonwealth Club of 1914–15 that prodded the state to embark on the land settlement experiments at Durham and Delhi. Rather, the Agriculture Section's report suggests that state-level attempts to stall federal land planning programs reflected a widespread unwillingness among business, agriculture, and civic leaders to oblige federal intrusion. The 1938 report as a whole, however, reflects confusion rather than a cohesive set of recommendations. The Agriculture Section actually seemed unable to reach any consensus regarding land-use planning. Instead, it cautiously recommended that the state give "careful study" and "careful consideration" to "all major new agricultural development ventures," to "past experiments in agricultural development," such as the Land Settlement Board experiments, and to "the nature and operation of planning agencies while they are still in the process of development." And despite its assertion that members were "startled" by land classification, zoning, and government purchase proposals, the section nonetheless supported the State Planning Board's plan for tax delinquent lands. The Agriculture Section also recommended that the state amend the 1937 Soil Conservation District Act to authorize "reasonable land use regulations" that would curtail "serious damage by soil erosion."<sup>15</sup>

By the 1930s, the Commonwealth Club had ceased to be the Legislature's principal citizen advisory body, but the club still maintained its tradition of studying and discussing major policy issues. The club also retained close ties with state legislators and government officials. Although its reports and recommendations no longer influenced legislation to the degree they once had, these reports still reflected policy issues seriously discussed among state leaders. The cautious tone of the 1938 land-use planning report indicates a climate of opinion favoring limited land-use regulations for agricultural land. It also reveals significant hostility toward dictating land-use planning policies to local units, especially if

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for delinquent taxes." Several amendments were made to the State Lands Commission Act in 1939, but they did not expand its authority over tax delinquent lands.

<sup>15</sup> "Land-Use Planning," *Transactions* 33, no. 5 (1938): 191–231, especially 201–205.

such policies accommodated national land planning goals. World War II soon intervened, however, and the State Planning Board turned its attention to studies for defense, housing, and industrial planning. As war-time exigencies demanded more of the board's time and energy, land-use planning disappeared from the agenda.

## THE RECONSTRUCTION AND REEMPLOYMENT COMMISSION, 1943–1947

A state government bureaucracy dominated by agencies was not in keeping with the policymaking style that Republican Earl Warren brought to the governor's office when he succeeded to that post in 1943. Warren preferred instead to appoint citizen advisory groups to recommend legislation. This gave at least the appearance of state government responding to actual public needs and desires. Upon taking office, Warren's primary concern was to plan for peacetime recovery. Early in the year he sponsored two bills: one abolishing the State Planning Board and replacing it with a Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission (RRC), and the other establishing a \$33 million postwar employment reserve fund that was to be used to construct needed state institutions. Both bills easily and quickly passed the Legislature.<sup>16</sup>

The Legislature supplanted research-oriented planning with what might be called a public relations approach to planning when it passed the Reconstruction and Reemployment Act in 1943. The RRC's first annual report made it clear that the commission considered planning to be a function of state government only insofar as planning would allow the state to promote and coordinate industrial economic development through private enterprise.<sup>17</sup> Unlike the State Planning Board, which functioned with a professionally trained director and staff, the RRC consisted entirely of state officials who, in turn, sat as the chairpersons for citizen advisory

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<sup>16</sup> Richard B. Harvey, *Earl Warren: Governor of California* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969), especially "The Citizen Advisory Bodies," 70–80; Lloyd Ray Henderson, "Earl Warren and California Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1965), 158–159; *California Statutes*, 1943 (Extra Sessions, 1941–1943), Chapter 631.

<sup>17</sup> California, Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, *Report and Recommendations for the Period Ending December 31, 1944* (Sacramento, January 1945), especially 1–2.

committees. Warren appointed a businessman, Alexander R. Heron, as the executive director. Heron was qualified for the position by virtue of his previous government service experience as Director of Finance under Governor C.C. Young (1926–30), and as labor relations advisor for the federal War Production Board, but the only planner in the entire organization was Van Buren Stanbery, who served as chief of technical staff. Professional planners held no decision-making power in the new planning agency.<sup>18</sup>

Also unlike the State Planning Board, which had no resources to distribute, the RRC had millions of dollars to disburse to local governments on a fifty-fifty matching basis to stimulate local planning and help local governments acquire sites for public works and other improvements that would benefit the state as a whole. The League of California Cities acted as the agent through which the commission offered economic consultation to cities and counties applying for state funds. The RRC also boasted of “close cooperation” between it and the California Chamber of Commerce, the California State Federation of Labor, the state-level Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Pacific Advertising Association, the All-Year Club of Southern California (which promoted tourism), and the State Association of County Supervisors.<sup>19</sup> With the state Reconstruction and Reemployment Act, California offered local governments, for the first time, the carrot of state funds to encourage local-level planning. It also established a bureaucratic structure that restrained the influence of professional planners and allowed local governments and citizen interest groups to shape state planning policies.

A major portion of the commission’s work consisted of making legislative recommendations generated by the citizen advisory committees. In effect, the RRC served as an official clearinghouse, sifting through the legislative requests of special interest groups. This resulted in a confusing array of legislative proposals submitted during the 1945 session, covering

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, organizational information on pp. ii–iv. Heron left his position as director of operations for the War Department’s Manpower Board in Washington, D.C., to accept the appointment as director of the Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission; see Henderson, 159–160.

<sup>19</sup> Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, *Report* (Sacramento, 1945), 6; Judith Norvell Jamison, *Coordinated Public Planning in the Los Angeles Region* (University of California, Los Angeles: Bureau of Governmental Research, Studies in Local Government, no. 9, June 1948), 130.

problems as disparate as providing medical care for children with cerebral palsy, organizing airport districts, securing unemployment insurance, and disposing of temporary war housing. Orderly land-use conversion to accommodate the war-induced population surge — people almost everyone expected to remain in California — did not figure among the concerns or legislative recommendations of the commission.<sup>20</sup>

Economic planning dominated RRC activities from August 1943 to its dissolution in 1947. The commission responded to the needs as well as the whims of city councils, county boards of supervisors, chambers of commerce, industry, and labor unions. “Grass roots” planning is what the commission proudly called its efforts and accomplishments, which were considerable, but overall coordination was noticeably lacking. Through the myriad activities of the RRC, the state fully implemented the policy framework established by the 1929 Planning Act. By pumping millions of dollars to the local level to finance projects the RRC deemed worthy of public funding, the state accomplished three things. First, it kept intact the home rule principle of planning. Second, it encouraged local units to think of planning narrowly — in terms of civic projects and public works development. Third, and perhaps most important, it interrupted the federal–local level planning partnership that several New Deal programs had fostered. Nowhere was the latter accomplishment more apparent than in regional planning developments.

## THE RRC AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Ironically, the economic development–oriented RRC, under Heron’s leadership, succeeded in reviving regional planning in California, a feat no doubt more attributable to the commission’s strong programmatic ties with local governments and special interest groups than to any philosophical commitment shared by commission members. The 1937 amendments to the State Planning Act included a mandate to the State Planning

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<sup>20</sup> Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, *Report* (1945), 81–116, and *Report and Recommendations for the Year Ending December 31, 1945* (Sacramento, January 1946), 25–44, and *Third Report to the Government and the Legislature* (Sacramento, January 1947), which recapitulates much of the information contained in the first two reports.

Board to divide the state into regional planning districts, defined as areas delineated by “natural physiograph[y]” and as “having mutual social and commercial interests.”<sup>21</sup> The rhetoric might suggest that the Legislature intended to reverse the 1929 framework that left planning in the hands of local governments. In reality, however, the state was not so much concerned with planning as it was threatened by loss of power in the federal system.

Local events preceded state action. In 1935, planner Hugh Pomeroy, who had worked on the Los Angeles Regional Plan during the 1920s, was appointed to the state’s WPA advisory committee to coordinate professional and technical projects. He appreciated the assistance that regional planning bodies within states could provide to the WPA as it carried out its field surveys and research projects. More to the point, he realized that the WPA could stimulate regional planning, through the proverbial back door, by assigning federal workers to organized regional planning bodies. Pomeroy proceeded to experiment in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he succeeded in persuading Bay Area government officials to revive the spirit of the old Regional Plan Association, but the effort was short-lived. In September 1935, the San Francisco Metropolitan Area Planning Commission was organized, but with only counties represented. This, plus necessary reliance upon voluntary participation, made negotiations with the WPA difficult, and at times impossible.<sup>22</sup>

Following Pomeroy’s unsuccessful attempt, the Commonwealth Club initiated, in 1939, another discussion of regional planning, this time in response to federal defense preparations. Military installations were suddenly rising all over the Bay Area without benefit of coordination on the state or regional levels. The club’s City Planning Section, under the direction of San Mateo County Planning Engineer Ronald L. Campbell, recommended the establishment of a provisional regional planning association, but the club took no further action toward that end.<sup>23</sup> By 1940, regional planning in the Bay Area appeared to have stalled.

The situation in the Los Angeles area was equally arrested. During the depression years of the 1930s the metropolitan planning network in Los Angeles County crumbled as more and more city planning commissions

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<sup>21</sup> *California Statutes*, 1937, Chapter 665, Section 2.2.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, 231–232.

<sup>23</sup> “Regional Planning,” *Transactions* v. 37, no. 5 (1942): 167–196.

suspended activities. In response, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors curtailed the advance planning functions of the Regional Planning Commission. Nevertheless, federal relief and public works programs gave the commission new, and potentially more powerful, coordinative functions. City officials balked, however, when the Board of Supervisors tried to have the county designated as the official governmental unit to coordinate all public works in the area, mediating between the federal government and the cities and special districts encompassed by the county. Pressure from cities that wanted to negotiate directly with the federal government forced the county to abandon its effort.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1930s, people of diverse persuasions could agree, in principle, that regional planning was socially beneficial. In practice, however, cities, and, to a lesser degree, counties sought chiefly to protect their powers and economies. By the late 1930s, state government powers were under siege. New Deal relief funds and public works projects had stimulated closer ties between Washington and local governments. Now federal funds for national defense threatened to strengthen those ties. State-directed regional planning provided a means by which the California Legislature could restore the state's position in the federal system. It is doubtful that Governor Olson and the Legislature deliberately sought, in 1937, to transform the State Planning Board from an unwelcome federal presence into a tentacle of the state police power. However, the amendments to the State Planning Act, which clarified county planning authority and procedures and which initiated statewide regional planning, are evidence that the state was attempting to reassert its dominance over local governments and yet reaffirm its 1929 commitment to local-level planning. Thus, county planning powers were immeasurably strengthened at the same time the state embarked on its first serious regional planning effort.

Counties might have changed the course of events if, during the 1930s, they had chosen to assert their legislated mandate in planning. Indeed, some professional planners hoped that counties would take the lead in land-use planning to counter an emerging trend in cities, many of which had distilled planning principles to zoning selectively in response to vocal commercial, industrial, or residential interests that sought to protect

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<sup>24</sup> Jamison, 136–137.

their property rights. Such hopefuls stressed that planning's fundamental aim should be to secure "the most economically productive utilization of land."<sup>25</sup> Planner Hugh Pomeroy and others even anticipated that county supervisors and planning commissions would instigate so-called functional analyses to classify land for its potential and best uses (i.e., industrial, residential, agricultural, forest, mineral development, recreation) and to zone land according to such classifications well in advance of development. Even so, planners foresaw that countywide zoning probably could not be used "to regulate rural land uses in general" and thus advocated that any "major land use plan should leave undisturbed the traditional freedom of the open country except as scenic areas or traffic thoroughfares are involved or as nuisances may be concerned."<sup>26</sup> Those who saw the promise of county planning in the 1910s also had to admit that rural politics presented a major obstacle. In 1931, L. Deming Tilton, then director of planning in Santa Barbara County, noted, for instance, that the "county has never been especially hospitable to advanced ideas or to progressive policies" and that "county officials often shun the idea of assuming the legitimate responsibilities of government."<sup>27</sup>

Thus, if the years 1937 and 1938 might have been a turning point, laissez-faire sentiments prevailing among county dwellers in general precluded county governments from assuming a leading role in land-use planning. One must also view this potential turning point in relation to California politics of the 1930s. Nominally Republican-dominated since the Progressive Era, state and local politics took on a partisan flavor during the 1930s, partly in response to the success of New Deal programs and partly in response to Upton Sinclair's controversial End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign. When Democrat Culbert Olson assumed the governorship, California liberals inherited a long-awaited opportunity to reinstall a progressive spirit into state politics. Olson, however, never

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<sup>25</sup> Albert G. Hinman, "The Economic Importance of Real Estate Classification," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* [hereinafter cited as *Annals AAPSS*] 154 (March 1930): 15.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh R. Pomeroy, "County Zoning Under the California Planning Act," *Annals AAPSS* 155, pt. 2 (May 1931): 56–58.

<sup>27</sup> L. Deming Tilton, "Regulating Land Uses in the County," *Annals AAPSS* 155, pt. 2 (May 1931): 127–128.

enjoyed or cultivated solid support from the Legislature. Between 1937 and 1943, Democrats controlled the Assembly, while Republicans maintained control of the Senate. Olson, moreover, was a controversial figure, and his administration did not escape justifiable charges of favoritism and corruption. In 1942, the Republican candidate, Earl Warren, had no difficulty defeating the incumbent.<sup>28</sup>

During Olson's administration, the State Planning Board received its first state funding and state recognition as a legitimate agency. Director Tilton nonetheless sensed the pitfalls of partisan politics. He and the board realized from the beginning that they would encounter tremendous local opposition, thereby jeopardizing the board's already tenuous existence if it carried out the 1937 mandate to divide the state into regional planning districts. Therefore, other than simply conferring new legal status on the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission in 1939, the board took no action until 1941.<sup>29</sup>

Proliferating defense installations in the Bay Area finally stimulated the State Planning Board to act more decisively. There, two aborted regional planning attempts signified some receptivity to the board's mandate. In March, 1941, the board held a hearing in San Francisco to take the first step toward creating a third Bay Area organization. Despite Tilton's claim that the board "didn't want to impose upon any group of communities a regional machinery if they didn't want it," the language of the 1937 statute directed the State Planning Board to design regional plans. The law also directed proposed regional planning bodies to implement those plans. When Bay Area cities and counties fully realized the board's intent, most reacted with indignation. The board retreated. Tilton restated its position in a December 1941 communication to Bay Area planning commissions. This time the board requested counties and cities to band together in a regional planning body that would be voluntary, temporary, and advisory.

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of California partisan politics in the 1930s, see Michael Paul Rogin and John L. Shover, *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890–1966* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1970), especially "The Resurgence of the Democratic Party in California," 112–152. For a sympathetic account of Governor Olson, see Robert E. Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953).

<sup>29</sup> Jamison, 31, 38.

Reconsidered responses from Bay Area counties and cities were lukewarm at best.<sup>30</sup>

Even wartime demands for intergovernmental cooperation could not persuade local leaders to moderate territorialism. Speaking in formal opposition to Bay Area regional planning before the Commonwealth Club in 1942, Fred S. Newsom, business manager of the *Richmond Independent*, stated that it was pure “illusion” to think that smaller governmental units could “follow this trend to centralization without penalty.” Regional planning, even advisory, as Newsom saw it, was but another step toward totalitarianism. It “would wipe out the individuality in cities . . . and counties . . . and states, to make them all of a pattern under a central government which begins by suggestion and ends by mastery.”<sup>31</sup> The State Planning Board dropped the matter.

As the war progressed, however, local government officials and members of local chambers of commerce began to fear that regional cooperative measures would be necessary to avert a possible postwar economic depression. Thus, when the Legislature replaced the State Planning Board with the Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission in 1943, Heron succeeded where Tilton had failed: he cajoled the nine Bay Area counties into organizing a regional planning commission by allowing them to do so on their own terms.<sup>32</sup>

In October 1943, the Bay Area Regional Development Council was organized. (“Development” was soon deleted from the official name.) Despite the council’s initial promise “to work for the progressive execution of a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the region,” it was an organization dominated by Bay Area businessmen, not professional planners. The council really served as a clearinghouse for coordinating the planning projects of public and private agencies in the Bay Area. It acted, in addition, as a project advisory committee for the

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<sup>30</sup> California State Planning Board, “Hearing on the Establishment of a San Francisco Bay Regional Planning District,” March 28, 1941, TS report; L. Deming Tilton, “A Regional Planning Organization for the San Francisco Bay Area,” TS of outline accompanying letter dated December 10, 1941, from Tilton to Oliver F. Campbell, chairman, Santa Clara County Planning Commission (SCCo Plan Dept: Improvement and Development: Regional Planning, San Francisco Bay Area Commission); Scott, 246–248.

<sup>31</sup> “Regional Planning,” *Transactions* (1942), 187–190.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, 261–263.

RRC. Although the council gave lip service to agriculture as one of the “four cornerstones of the area’s economy,” it had in mind no specific planning activities beyond preparing an areawide map of existing land uses, integrating the nine-county street and highway systems, and proposing a master airport plan.<sup>33</sup>

As an example of the close ties that existed between the Bay Area Regional Council and Bay Area businessmen, the council and local chambers of commerce cosponsored a series of “Bay Area Days” in 1948. The first such event, staged in San Jose on May 21, paid tribute to industrial growth in Santa Clara County with an “inspection trip” to some of the new and/or expanding companies, such as International Business Machines and Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation. Luncheon speakers “placed emphasis on the need for Bay Area-wide planning and action” which might contribute “to the location of new industries and provision of increased employment.”<sup>34</sup> In 1947, regional planning, conceived and nurtured as metropolitan planning and development, remained confined to the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas. It was, moreover, the antithesis of regional planning as envisioned by those sympathetic to New Deal ideas. Nonetheless, it was entirely in keeping with state policy.

## AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Agricultural land-use planning received no serious consideration as a necessary part of regional planning in either San Francisco or Los Angeles until the mid-1940s, when both urban areas suddenly started to spread out over larger geographic territories. Decentralization, as the new trend was

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<sup>33</sup> Bay Area Regional Development Council, “Draft Proposed Constitution,” October 16, 1943, and “Amended Proposed Constitution,” January 15, 1944, and “Minutes” of January 14, 1944, meeting (SCCo Plan Dept: Improvement and Development: Regional Planning, S.F. Bay Area Council); Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, *Report* (1945), 75–76 and *Report* (1946), 18–19; “Policy and Program: The San Francisco Bay Area Council,” n.d., and text of talk by Nestor Barrett on April 14, 1948, before the S.F. Bay Area Council, and “The San Francisco Bay Area Council” in *California Reports on Planning*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> “Press Release” issued for release on May 21, 1948, by S.F. Bay Area Council (SCCo Plan Dept: Improvement and Development: Regional Planning, S.F. Bay Area Council).

called, resulted from several factors in addition to accelerating population growth. One was the atomic bomb which many believed “imposed a dramatically new necessity for dispersion of those industries which are strategic and essential to the national defense.”<sup>35</sup> Expanding industries and corporations began, at the urging of chambers of commerce, to consider favorably the lower land acquisition and labor costs that smaller, regional centers offered. Improving transportation networks, in addition, made semi-rural living entirely feasible for people who wanted to retain their city jobs.

From mid-1946 to early-1948 the Commonwealth Club studied this new urban phenomenon. “Planned decentralization” was the course of action recommended by the club’s City Planning Section in a report vigorously debated by the membership. Despite reservations, members nevertheless supported, in principle, the planning and creation of “small ‘satellite’ cities limited in population by law to, say 35,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, set apart by permanent ‘greenbelts’ of farm or woodland areas.” The idea came straight from Ebenezer Howard and was carried to the club by Howard’s one-time protégé, F.J. Osborn of the British Planning Authority, who spoke on “Green Belt Cities” before the City Planning Section in November 1947. There is little indication that club members, however, seriously considered the greenbelt idea as anything more than an aesthetic means of establishing urban buffer zones, much the same as American city planners of the 1920s conceived of “garden cities.” Opponents of the greenbelt proposal maintained, moreover, that the state subsidies and tax benefits advocated to encourage planned decentralization were unconstitutional. They further warned that neither land developers nor business and industry leaders would ever submit to state-guided urban development.<sup>36</sup>

Opponents of planned decentralization had little to fear. Legislators, who generally favored continuing the state’s role in planning, disagreed fundamentally over whether the governor’s office or the Legislature should control the planning agency. In 1947, despite acrimonious debate, the Legislature passed the Conservation and Planning Act, a sweeping piece of legislation which superseded the 1929 Planning Act, consolidated scattered

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<sup>35</sup> “Decentralization of People and Industry,” *Transactions* 43, no. 1 (1948): 1-141.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

statutes and codes relating to planning, and created four new state agencies to carry out state-level planning. One of the four new agencies, the Office of the Director of Planning and Research (ODPR), replaced the Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission. ODPR was established under the governor's office, and the director was to be responsible for correlating the planning activities of all other state departments and agencies.<sup>37</sup>

Legislators opposed to the Conservation and Planning Act denounced it as a vehicle for political patronage and balked at the \$116,000 appropriation the bill carried. They managed to delay passage until the last day of the legislative session, waiting until an alternate measure, which would have created a less powerful planning board with a smaller appropriation of only \$50,000, failed to pass. But in 1948, as the postwar economy stabilized, thereby undermining one of the supposed needs for state planning and research, political opponents succeeded in persuading the Legislature to eliminate ODPR funding.<sup>38</sup> In its short one-year existence, the office, under an acting director, A. Earl Washburn, nonetheless managed to research the status of city and county planning throughout the state, the first time any state agency had undertaken to assess how local governments were implementing the various state laws pertaining to planning.

As California's two major metropolitan areas stood poised to receive a postwar population influx beyond the fantasies of even the most enthusiastic chamber of commerce boosters, the state still clung to the home rule planning policy established in 1929. At the time, however, few observers sensed any real threat of chaos. Carey McWilliams, often critical of state government and politics, displayed an uncharacteristic lack of insight into the consequences of urban decentralization by calling it "planning by indirection." He apologized for "the giant adolescent," which "has been outgrowing its governmental clothes, now, for a hundred years," by merely

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<sup>37</sup> *California Statutes*, 1947, Chapters 807 and 1408 respectively set forth the provisions of the act and created the Office of Director of Planning and Research; Chapters 868 and 869 amended the act to give city and county planning commissions a mandate for urban planning as distinguished from either city or county planning.

<sup>38</sup> *Sacramento Bee*, June 12, 1947; June 13, 1947; June 14, 1947; June 23, 1947; Thomas William Cohen, "The California Office of Planning and Research: Past Efforts; Future Possibilities" (M.C.P. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1977), 3. See also *California Reports on Planning*, the one report to issue from the Office of the Director of Planning and Research.

noting that “the nature of the state’s population growth creates special resistances to large-scale planning.” McWilliams was optimistic that urban decentralization, “a natural and, from many points of view, a highly desirable dispersion of population,” would, somehow, solve the state’s physical planning problems.<sup>39</sup>

It is more correct, however, to note that the troubled years of the Great Depression and World War II shattered the already fragmented planning visions obtained in the early decades of the twentieth century. If regional and rural planners were following different paths then, they had at least in those earlier years been able to mingle with government officials and businessmen as peers. By the early 1940s, civic and business leaders looked upon planners as technical assistants, at best, and, at worst, as bureaucratic obstructionists. Between 1929 and 1948, state policymakers reacted to events largely outside their control, events that generated economic, more than physical, growth problems. In the combined wake of depression and war, planning for economic recovery through industrial growth received increasing attention, and businessmen assumed greater authority in planning matters. Whatever cooperative spirit had once existed among planners, government officials, and business leaders disappeared in the troubled decades of the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>39</sup> Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (New York: Current Books, Inc., 1949), 17–24.