

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Podcast

Episode 35: FDR and National Planning

And welcome to the 34th episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller, and thank you so much for joining.

Hopefully, you've got through all of phenomenon known as Squid Games because you're two weeks out now from becoming full-fledged certified planners who will just revolutionize the profession; at least that should be your goal. Sounds cheesy, but for real, if you all don't make our communities better, who will? Shit, if we keep up the way we're going - spreading income inequality - I wouldn't be surprised if Squid Games becomes closer to reality than you all think. Anyways, on a slightly less bleak note.

Last episode we talked about FDR, his first 100 days, and some of his actions that started getting us out of the Great Depression like the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the very controversial Home Owner's Loan Corporation.

This week though, we're moving forward a bit to talk about the one and only national planning organization, the National Planning Board, which was then renamed and moved departments to become the National Resources Planning Board, and a few reports that they ended up developing during their weird tenure: their Final Report (in name only really) in 1934, and then the report, "Regional Factors in National Planning and Development," which was released under the new planning board's name in 1935.

It's super confusing, so I'll do my best to explain, and frankly, try to understand myself how this organization got all moved around, and what they even did.

Oh, and we're going to sprinkle in some Taylor Grazing Act too. But let's start with the National Planning Board. So, yeah, let's do it.

(02:13)

Alright, so let's start with a disclaimer. Holy shit, is it impossible to trace the lineage of the National Planning Board. It changed names, moved agencies like a damn chameleon. So, this whole schtick is what I was able to find and semi-understand. Let me know if I get any of this wrong and I'll totally correct it.

In 1933, as part of the New Deal, FDR created the Public Works Administration as part of the National Industrial Recovery Act in JUNE 1933. Now, the Public Works Administration was created in order to, well, work on large public works projects. Some projects that you probably know of that happened because of the Public Works Administration were the Hoover Dam, the Overseas Highway connecting Key West, the Lincoln Tunnel in New York City, the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State, and a bunch of airports and other stuff too.

Anyways, part of the Public Works Administration's organization was the creation of the National Planning Board, and their purpose was to, "advise and assist the Administrator in the preparation of the 'Comprehensive program of public works.'" Because what exactly was the other option? Just pick projects all willy-nilly? I mean, I'm sure leaders would love that kind of autonomy, but good 'ole FDR was better than that.

How though were they to go about doing this? By:

- 1) The preparation, development, and maintenance of comprehensive and coordinated plans for regional areas;
- 2) Survey and research the distribution and trends of the population, land uses, industry, housing, and natural resources, and the socioeconomic aspects involved in projects; and
- 3) The analysis of projects for coordination by location and sequence. Basically so projects didn't unnecessarily overlap each other and any project was fully a cooperated effort.

So, in July of 1933, Frederic Delano, Charles Merriam, and Wesley Clair Mitchell were appointed as the initial members. And over the course of the next year, the Board would hold a series of 17 meetings, and in August of 1934, they put out their "Final Report". Of course, this was under a new name based on their own recommendation, really.

(05:16)

The National Planning Board, in the process of planning for public works, noticed that details they needed to make their recommendations were lacking. So, they recommended changing that by suggesting that there needed to be a more permanent planning agency.

And in June of 1934 apparently, FDR performed an action straight out of Star Wars and executed Executive Order 6777 which formed the National Resources Planning Board, and abolished the National Planning Board, still under the authority of the National Industrial Recovery Act.

Then, in August of 1934, they put out their "Final Report."

That's right, the NRPB. This doesn't mean Frederic Delano, Charles Merriam, and Wesley Clair Mitchell were kicked to the curb though. It just means they sort of reorganized by moving the Board from the Public Works Administration to its own independent board which reported to the President, not the Public Works Administration's, well, Administrator.

Anyways though, what was in this "Final Report" that they released in August?

Well, it was broken into 4 Sections: Planning Activities, A Plan for Planning, Science in Planning, and National Planning – Digest of report.

- Section 1 – Planning Activities just really outlined what the National Planning Board did;
- Section 2 – A Plan for Planning outlined well, planning. The whole section is basically a primer on planning, historical development, types of planning, what's involved, the goal of, and the functions of a board;
- Section 3 – Science of Planning outlined the role of science in planning, and how social sciences can aid in Planning.
- Section 4 – National Planning-Digest of Report is also exactly how it sounds. Section 4 outlined the American Background in planning, then discussed planning in the U.S. in the then current times, and also planning abroad.

(07:52)

So, where did the NRPB go from here?

Well, under its new home, it took a larger focus on natural resources as opposed to public works projects. Ultimately, they created several committees which had more individualized areas of focus like Land Use or Water resources, and in December of 1935 they published their "Regional Factors in National Planning" under, again, a new name: the National Resources Committee. Jesus, it's like some stupid word game.

You see, in May of 1935, in a Supreme Court case which I won't name because who cares and no one will ask, the National Industrial Recovery Act was actually overturned. Like, made illegitimate.

And if you remember, the National Resource Planning Board was formed under the authority of the

National Industrial Recovery Act. So if that Act is deemed to be unconstitutional and illegitimate, so is the NRPB.

But, FDR said, "I really like this Board," so he reformed it again under the authority of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act, and just renamed it to the National Resources Committee. A rose by any other name.

That's not even really the end of it either. In 1939, it ended up being excluded from the Act it was transferred under, the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act, and FDR saved it again by combining the National Resources Committee and the Federal Employment Stabilization Board into a single group: the National Resources Planning Board. Yep, the same old name under the Executive Office of the President.

FDR is like, planning's hero. He keeps saving it like a damsel in distress, using a musical-chairs of names or some word vomit of planning and resources and committee and board.

It was at this point though, that it sort of turned from natural resources to economics and social programs, and eventually went by the wayside and went away in 1943.

But, they did release some pretty big reports along the way. Most notably, the report called, "Regional Factors in National Planning," in 1934.

(10:27)

So first, the report, "Regional Factors in National Planning" was actually selected by national scholars as, "part of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it." I shit you not.

Anyways, the report, a whopping 248 pages, addressed regional problems that were brought about but some recent activities and realizations. These were very explicitly outlined in the forward under the title, "The Problem". Planners don't mess around.

- 1) "The increasingly clear realization of the inadequacy of single States to carry out all planning programs necessary for conserving our national resources, both natural and human ... as illustrated by the widespread efforts to negotiate interstate compacts dealing with watershed, oil conservation, labor standards, and crime prevention...;
- 2) The development of an extensive interstate cooperation movements...;
- 3) The rise of interstate metropolitan planning...;
- 4) The emergence and activity of two group-of-States planning regions – the Pacific Northwest Regional Commission and the New England Regional Planning Commission...;
- 5) The establishment of more than 100 types of Federal regional areas dealing with field administration and department planning...;
- 6) The creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the proposals for the establishment of other like authorities...; and
- 7) The pressure of economic distress and unbalance in various agricultural-industrial areas of the United States, and the corresponding necessity of establishing subnational administration in the regions served by the several economic groups..."

The next section, which outlined some findings and principles, lists the nine recommendations geared towards to the problems of regional organizations. Yes, another list:

- 1) State Planning – Basically, just continued support for state planning boards;
- 2) The Establishment of Regional Planning Commissions – Not necessarily permanent, more on an as needed basis with the support of the National Planning Agency;
- 3) Encouragement of Interstate Compacts;
- 4) The Use of Federal Corporate Authorities – Basically, if there's an existing federal group semi-involved, feel free to use them as needed;
- 5) Advance Planning – Seems redundant, but yes, the planning should come before the development program;
- 6) Continuous National Planning – A recommendation to establish a permanent National Planning Board that obviously never happened;
- 7) A Permanent National Development Administration – Basically, the recommendation was that all the

work from the Public Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Employment Stabilization Office, etc. should all be brought together to become a permanent government office;

8) Regional Development Methods and (in a very oxymoron sounding recommendation);

9) Federal Administrative Regional Centralization – Which really equated to consolidating a lot of the different autonomous groups to a more hierarchical structure.

(14:10)

As an aside, I want to point out something that's really refreshing to see. Odd that we get that looking back sometimes. On page, I don't know, roman numeral 7, third paragraph, the writers' make a pretty important observation regarding regional planning, and I think it's pretty applicable to what we all do really.

They make an observation on a detail that they say, "is often overlooked" when we do the whole Federal vs. State's rights thing (which for our purposes we can just read as, city vs county, or county vs. state, or city vs. neighboring city even). What's "often overlooked" is "the fact that major problem areas frequently overlap state boundaries [or just read as 'boundaries'] and yet cover only a part of the whole Nation.

They use the examples of production areas, manufacturing areas, transportation, corn, cotton, citrus, coal (some of these are dated), and make the point that these things don't respect jurisdictional boundaries. But, here we are, one City addressing homelessness while their neighbor ignores it, or one City's economic development team poaching a business from the neighboring City. Does that really help you? Is your City really any better off by bringing down your neighbor? Now you're just a town neighboring a hapless place. Is that any good? Does that really benefit anyone in your community?

Maybe we should stop pushing problems onto our neighbors and start addressing them together, yeah? Maybe every City's planning department should have a "Regional Planning" division. We have long-range planning, transportation planning, code compliance, zoning. Why not Region? Why can't their job be working with the other divisions on how it all fits in with our neighbors?

I don't know, just a thought.

(16:23)

Anyways, I'm a little over my time for today, so we'll push the Taylor Grazing Act to next week. This week, we didn't cover as many topics, but they required a little more clarification with all the name changing and stuff.

We started with the National Planning Board, born into the Public Works Administration via the Federal Industrial Recovery Act. Ultimately, they got moved over to their own thing and renamed to the National Resources Planning Board (still under the authority of the Federal Industrial Recovery Act) right before they released their first, "Final Report" in 1934 which outlined just a lot of details of planning in general.

Then, they got another overhaul when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Federal Industrial Recovery Act. So, they changed names again like they're in witness protection or something, to the National Resources Committee, and they released another report in 1935 called the Regional Factors in National Planning and Development which basically explained the importance of, and provided recommendations on how to appropriately, plan in a regional context.

In 1939, it changed back to its previous name, the National Resources Planning Board, before just being done away with in 1943. Because, you know, WWII.

(18:05)

Well, thanks again for joining me! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialaicpguide@gmail.com and I'll do my best to help out if I can. This week was a little in a longer time span: name changes and reports, misleading names and whatnot. Shit, and all for naught too. There's not even a National Planning Board anymore ...

Anyways, for those who tuned in last episode our question was, "Which of the programs or Acts that we talked about related to employment?"

The answer there is the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Both in 1933 if you were wondering. For bonus points.

If you want to play along, we'll do two questions for this episode, "Who were the three original members of the National Planning Board, and what was the name of the organization that published 'Regional Factors in National Planning and Development'?"

As always, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts and feel free to sign up on the show's website so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens, and share this out with any planners you know, and don't forget to leave a review either.

I told you I'd be better. Sort of. I know it wasn't earlier in the week, but still this week.

Tune in again next episode, we'll hit the Tennessee Valley Authority since it's one of the factors that was brought up in "Regional Factors in National Planning and Development" Then we'll pivot over to the Taylor Grazing Act and round it out with two Conservation Acts: The Soil Conservation Act and the Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act.

Thanks again everyone, 'till next time.

Links:

FDR and National Planning seem to go hand-in-hand. Because they do. Literally. Planning on a national level spanned almost the exact same time frame as FDR's Presidency, and FDR just wouldn't like it go away; bringing it back under name after name after name. Both Started in 1933, and National Planning died in 1943, two years before FDR. This one's all about the blip on the planning radar called, National Planning.

The National Planning Board:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/economics/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/national-resources-planning-board-nrpb>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Works_Administration

https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file_send?accession=osu1486652373261456&disposition=attachment

National Planning Board Final Report

<https://archive.org/details/finalreport1933to1934unitrich/page/n7/mode/2up>

National Resources Planning Board

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Resources_Board_of_1934

<https://archive.org/details/reportonnational1934unitrich/page/n7/mode/2up>

Regional Factors in National Planning

<https://www.amazon.com/Regional-National-Development-Resources-Committee/dp/1297819470>

<https://archive.org/details/regionalfactorsi1935unitrich?ref=ol&view=theater>

