

1975
MAY

RECENT E. S. P. C. HISTORY

May 27, 1975.

In early 1972, the Edmonton Social Planning Council adopted its current official (for purposes of registration under the Societies' Act) objects, to wit:

"The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an agent for social change and development.

An objective of the organization is to develop and maintain a voluntary non-governmental capability for informed decision making and action.

The Council provides resources to initiate and also to support efforts through which citizen plans can be developed and implemented.

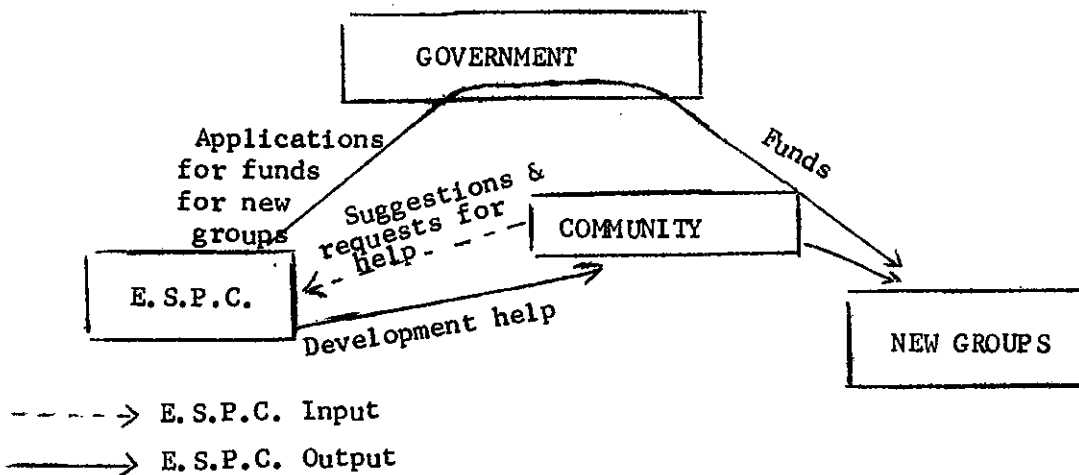
Three stages in the Council's development since that time may be identified:

STAGE 1 (1970-1972) The Community Development Stage.

*Keejano
Women's
Boys St. Co-op
Avenue
Shelter*

Providing intensive organizational help to self-help groups (e.g. Action Group of the Disabled) and community groups filling perceived gaps in social services (e.g., Women's Emergency Shelter) in the formative stages of these groups. This stage marked the break from the traditional agency-oriented planning of the Council. To a large extent this new approach was responsible for Director's changing (Stewart Bishop, now the United Way planner was replaced by Bettie Hewes as Acting Director for two years). These changes came at a time when the societal mood was oriented to small communist self-help organizations instead of large traditionally structured agencies and boards, as manifested in government LIP and OFY programs, evolving organizational forms from bureaucracy to community, etc. It is no coincidence that the structure of the Council was changed drastically to the co-ordinating committee/co-chairman/co-ordinator structure to replace the Board of Directors/executive/executive director structure at the same time as the new objects of the Council were adopted.

The orientation of the Council at this time may be represented as follows:



STAGE 2 (1973-1974) The Self-Appointed-Advisory-Committee-to-Government Stage.

This stage began with the complete turnover of planning staff. Peter, Roger and Deloris all came on at about the same time in the fall of 1972. Peter and Roger, when applying for their positions, indicated that they thought the kind of task force approach they had been using in their previous work might have some applications to Social Planning programs. There was a concern by the new staff and by a number of people on the co-ordinating committee that the Council's role as community developer was too diffuse and hazy to allow it to maintain itself financially. There was a great sense of identity crisis (not uncommon in social planning councils anywhere at anytime).

After a great deal of discussion within the staff and Co-ordinating Committee, the citizens' commission/task force approach was evolved. (It was perhaps significant that both the City and Provincial Government were asking the Edmonton Social Planning Council, and other groups, for reactions on such matters as proposed new public assistance and urban transportation programs.) It was hoped that it would help create social change by exerting pressure (moral, informational, and in the broad sense, political) on government which had the resources and the position to change society whether that meant raising welfare rates, developing more daycare, democratizing planning, humanizing the corrections system, reorienting priorities in the parks system, or whatever. Both task forces and citizens' commissions were to produce information and recommendations to governments through research by groups of citizens from various community groups. Task forces were to be short-term projects reactive to specific issues. Commissions were to be longer-term and more broadly oriented.

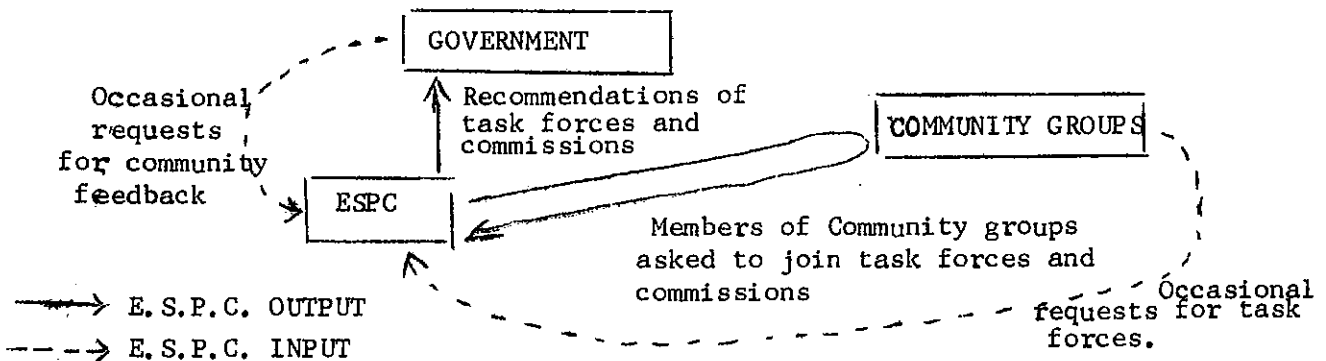
The commissions were considered not only as research bodies to present recommendations to government but also to solve some of the identity problems of the Council; a) by identifying four areas of substantive concern; b) by indicating what direction social change should take in these areas -- i.e., by establishing our values. In this way it was hoped that where the Council lay along the three dimensions in which identity was confused could be clarified. The three dimensions were:

substantive: What social issues or problems was the Council concerned about? Establishing four commissions on participatory democracy, humane social controls, decent standard of living and humane urban environment, provided the answer in value--laden terms.

orientation to social change: What degree of social change was the Council concerned about? It was agreed that on the dimensions stretching from direct personal help through administrative reform, through system reform, to utopian societal restructuring that the Council straddled the middle two points.

activities: What kinds of things did the Council do to achieve the degree of social change sought in the substantive areas specified? It was agreed that the Council would do research, consultation, public education. It would not provide direct service to individuals, co-ordinating agencies, and probably not attempt to mobilize groups to expect political power through members.

In this stage, the way in which the Council decided to meet its objectives can be diagrammed as:



STAGE 3 (1974-1975) The Consultation-to-Citizens-Groups Stage.

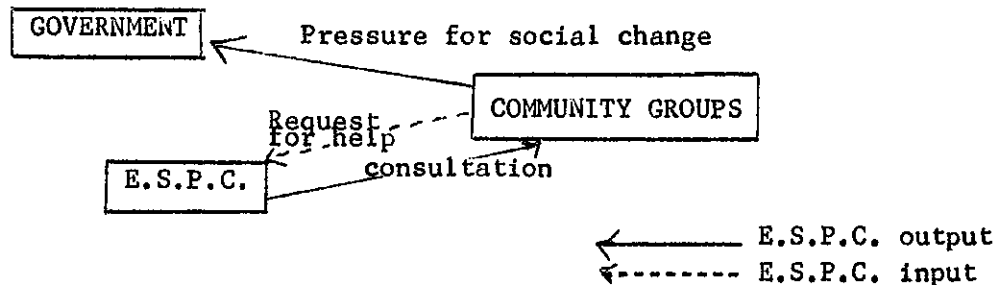
In the current stage the substantive areas of concern identified by the four commissions in stage two are retained (though specified at a lower level of generality in terms of client group priorities, i.e. neighbourhood groups and womens groups) as are the orientation to social change (administrative reform and system reform) and the kind of activities engaged in (research, consultation, and public education). The programs of the Council have been re-focused, however, away from task forces and citizens commissions and toward providing research, education, organizational consultation and in the facilitating rather than the structural imposition sense co-ordination, -- all grouped under the rubric of consultants to existing citizens groups. This consultation is oriented to aiding groups achieve the social change judged by the E.S.P.C. and groups alike as desirable. This brings the Council back to an aspect of its Stage 1 approach i.e. primary orientation to citizens groups rather than government. But it changes this orientation from the community development role, i.e. helping a diverse previously unconnected, collection of people organized as a group to one of supplying services to existing groups which are already organized and ready to use the service to create social change -- indeed organized to the point of being able to request the service.

It is felt that this Stage 3 approach combines the best of both Stages 1 and 2. It is oriented to strengthening citizens groups (instead of using them to help the E.S.P.C. pressure government) on the one hand, while it is oriented to see government change its operations as a result of pressure from community groups aided by the E.S.P.C. on the other hand. We now feel that we are providing a service which the Council can develop the expertise to provide within its limited resources and which fills a gap in the community -- nobody else in Edmonton provides research, consultation, free to community groups, co-ordinates these across the City on specific issues, provides initial developmental help to city-wide groups that requests it (e.g. getting them in touch with those who can give them more extensive help) or provides educational materials and how-to-do-it handbooks on some of the substantive areas of concern.

The Stage 3 approach also avoids the respective pitfalls of stages 1 and 2 -- the ambiguity of the parent role to many community groups the Council had organized without having the resources to always be an adequate parent, the confusion as to where the Council ended and the new group started (in the minds of the Council, group and public), the lack of goals which could be set by the Council as the Council's goals as opposed to the

collection of group goals, some of which were conflicting, were problems of Stage 1 which Stage 3 is designed to avoid. The Stage 2 problems of being too involved again in developing groups rather than providing a service, of being seen as using the task forces and commissions as fronts (which was largely true, though not in a manipulative sense of the people involved in these bodies as they were involved because they were of a common mind with each other and with the Council staff) are also to be avoided by the Stage 3 approach.

The present Council role can be diagrammed thus:



With the development of Stage 3 in the work of the Council came an increasing concern about the Council structure, which on the one hand provided for no vigorous volunteer leadership on the part of a few, but on the other exacted heavy time commitments from all in the form of bi-weekly meetings. Strain developed between many on the Co-ordinating Committee and the staff, the former often feeling that they were being manipulated by the staff and used as legitimizers for the Council activities without having any control over them, the latter feeling that Co-ordinating members were willing to make decisions without bearing the responsibility for carrying them through. It is hoped that the new structure will alleviate this strain by identifying a hierarchy of roles in terms of time commitment expected of volunteers and concomitant responsibility expected. At the same time, certain aspects of the immediately previous structure have been retained, such as the opportunity for the Board to co-opt members, the openness of meetings, etc. Apart from the official by-laws, the structure of the Council was changed to provide for an Executive Director instead of a Co-ordinator. This too should more clearly delineate lines of authority for the benefit of the Board (they will know who is in charge), the Executive Director (authority will now match sense of responsibility) and new staff (who previously had no senior staff person to designate or evaluate work).

The United Way seems relatively pleased with the Council currently and likes the new approach of being a consultant. Relationships with the City are also reasonably good. With the structure, and work orientation which have evolved over the last half dozen years providing responsibility and clarity to Council purpose, community role, and operational procedures, the Edmonton Social Planning Council should have a bright future.