LOCAL ATTITUDES
A DETERMATE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE SMALL TOWN

by

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ABSTRACT

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Ronald K. Burke

Whether growing or declining, small towns located within or isolated from metropolitan areas are confronted with the pressures of urbanization which produce changes in their environment and their way of life. The attitudes of the people of these towns is a factor of their perception of the effects of change. The thesis of this work is that the attitudes of the local people significantly influence development in the small town. Through a case study, the work illustrates attitudes shaped by the forces of change and demonstrates how these attitudes can be taken into account in the planning process.

Conroe, Texas, seat of Montgomery County, serves as the case study. As a part of the Houston metropolitan area, the town experiences changes which are more dramatic than those of the isolated rural town. This difference is given perspective through a statistical study of small towns and counties in Texas.

Although some social scientists would define the metropolitan small town as a sub-community of the metropolitan community, the leaders in Conroe identify their community as Montgomery County. The pressures of urbanization upon this community is essentially a confrontation between local and metropolitan forces. It is through the people's
response to urban pressures in Conroe that attitudes which influence development are defined.

The way the people of Conroe respond to urban pressures is a factor of two principal influences: (1) the stage of community growth, or rate of change, and (2) the territory or the physical community to which they respond. They assume a level of confidence and progressiveness based upon the current stage of growth, growth potential, and present and anticipated changes. Their concerns are limited to a physical territory whether downtown, city, or county. The desire to maintain local control makes them especially sensitive to changes within their territory.

The research in Conroe reveals the need for a shift in planning emphasis. The proposed emphasis further distinguishes the isolated from the metropolitan small town. City and county leaders' efforts to plan for the impact of growth in their community must be founded upon an understanding of the difference between self-generated and imposed growth. Planning for growth as though it is generated from within the community cannot cope with imposed metropolitan growth. Planning emphasis should shift from growth control to adaptations for change. Anticipation of the changes introduced by metropolitan growth may be the surest way of maintaining the desired local control.
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The professional planner, urban designer, or architect is involved with change. As an urban designer I began my inquiry into the small town with an interest in people's response to change. To discover how people's attitudes are shaped by their perceptions of change and in turn how their attitudes affect development in the small town, I make the following suppositions. The process of urbanization in America is evolving gigantic urban concentrations which have either isolated or absorbed the small town. The people of these towns are particularly sensitive to change for they are linked with their environment through a community heritage, in contrast to the urbanite who has exchanged his community heritage for mobility and for whom change has become a way of life. In a town with a population less than 50,000, functional and physical changes can be readily detected. Activities are not so diverse that leaders are forced to be selective in their involvement, but may participate in many of the prime community functions. The way these community leaders perceive their community affects development in their town.

Small towns may be distinguished by their location and by their economic viability. Among the towns that are isolated from the metropolis, some are declining in population and struggling for economic survival. The rate of change may be slow in these towns, but decline seems
irreversible. Other towns outside the metropolitan areas are resisting this trend. They have been able to develop a growth dynamics similar to that of the metropolis. As they serve a hinterland of surrounding towns and villages, they provide a positive influence for rural areas. Change for these towns is the transition from independence to interdependence.

Towns located within the metropolitan areas are an integral part of the dynamics of metropolitanism. Change within these towns is a factor of the rate of growth or decline of the metropolitan area and the area's land use and geographic development patterns. These towns are either growing or declining determined by their location within the metropolitan area and the viability of the metropolis itself.

The case study for this work is a town located within the growth pattern of a burgeoning metropolis. It is a rural county seat enjoying urban prosperity and facing urban problems. The intensity of development in and around the town has accentuated the changes in the matrix of the community and people's response to these changes. Perceptions gained in an exaggerated situation indicate approaches to use in dealing with the effects of urbanization in all types of small towns.
URBANIZATION AND THE SMALL TOWN
The 1970 census revealed that eighty-four per cent of the nation's growth during the census period was concentrated in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas and the counties they dominate. The migration of people from the hinterlands to the metropolitan areas resulted in half of the nation's counties showing losses for the decade, while the bulk of the population growth was contained in only a fourth of the total number of counties. These statistics reflect current trends in the continued urbanization of America. There are a relatively few major urban areas gaining the majority of the U. S. population, while many other cities and towns have stabilized in their growth or have actually lost population.

The fact that some towns appear to be losing population isn't a new phenomenon in the U. S. During the height of industrialization in the nineteenth century many small towns declined due to a loss of demand for some natural resource they might have possessed or for the failure to exploit some local advantage. The loss of these towns was seen as an evolutionary process and even a sign of progress. Today the surge of metropolitanism threatens the isolated small town even more dramatically than during the peak of industrialization in this country. For the most part, these towns are looked upon as, "...out of joint with our urban technological times, but like our aged people, unable to become productive again or conveniently die."
The question is, do the people of these declining small towns really have an alternative to their plight? Do they have a choice of whether to continue living in their town or must they join the migration to the metropolis? There is the concern on the part of some government officials that these people should have a choice. In a speech prepared for a governor's conference in 1971, Texas Governor Preston Smith announced that the state was taking steps to obtain a balanced growth in the state by, "...expanding its efforts in low population counties." He promised, "We will concentrate on using all state, local and federal resources at our disposal."^4

If there is to be assistance provided to the isolated small towns, two assumptions would determine the course of action: that various forms of assistance could allow low population areas to promote local programs of self-help, and that such efforts would make a significant difference in their fate; and that regardless of the initial boost from the outside, the towns might still be ineffective in countering the negative influence of metropolitanism, and that the only way to assure the people the right to live in these towns, is through the use of some form of public subsidy.

Whichever course of action is selected, it is crucial that those making planning decisions be in touch with the attitudes of the community leaders. If the concept of the "natural" evolution of progress is adopted, then it must be assumed that these leaders are to blame for their situation. Thus, it will be essential that they adopt attitudes of progress if the community is to grow and prosper. On the other hand,
there remains the question of whether the town's people are really interested in progress if it entails the necessity for growth and drastic change in their accustomed way of life. If allowed the alternatives between upgrading their economic circumstance through growth, and simply stabilizing their economic condition through minimum changes upon the community, they may choose the latter to avoid the pace necessary to assure a growing, prosperous town. The matter of choice in this case is over a way of life and not just a place to live.

Though an over-simplification, the planning alternatives do illustrate the importance of local attitudes in the planning process and especially in dealing with the problems of survival in the isolated town. Such a town is a very special planning problem. The forces that are affecting its condition are from outside the community and are of such magnitude that proposed solutions can easily appear meaningless even though the assumption is made that there can be some positive effects. The planner may be aware of the magnitude of the forces acting upon the town, but are the people of that town so perceptive? Their response to the problems can only be as sensible as their sensitivity to the causes of their circumstance. The planners' special sensitivity, then, must be to the people's attitudes as an indication of their perception of their circumstance, of its causes, and of the effects of the possible alternatives.

For the policy-makers who hold the power to affect the plight of these towns, there would appear to be only the alternatives of taking action or sitting back and watching these towns continue their struggle for
survival. The lack of action would not necessarily speed up an inevitable fate, however, as there will be people who resist and others who are incapable of pursuing an alternative. The present trend of these towns forecasts a dismal future, a future in which they may be caught in a,

...long drawn-out struggle for community survival, lasting for half a century, in which some battles may be won but the war will be lost. A future in which most such towns will be isolated or decayed, in which the local amenities must deteriorate, and in which there will finally be left only the aged, the inept, the very young, and the local power elite.

1120 The "Micropolis"

Outside the metropolitan areas, there are some small towns which show a resistance to any negative effects of the major urban concentrations. They continue to show a healthy economy and even experience population increases. In many ways they resemble the metropolitan areas. They appear to serve a hinterland in a similar fashion as do the central cities of metropolises. The smaller towns and villages within the hinterlands take advantage of the jobs and amenities of the larger town and in turn maintain or even increase their own populations.

An interest in these towns has provided the impetus behind the creation of the Center for the Study of Local Government at St. John's University in Minnesota. Its founder, Dr. Edward L. Henry, is convinced that there are a significant number of Americans who would prefer the quality of life in the small town if it could be made practicable. He sites
a 1966 Gallup Poll where almost a fourth of the residents of cities with over fifty thousand population expressed a preference for "small town" living. To Dr. Henry, that meant that there were over twenty-two million people in the U. S., who, if placed in towns of a population of around twenty-five thousand, would require nearly twice as many towns as exist of that size. According to his data, there are many reasons to anticipate an increase of population in rural America. The non-farm rural, those who do little or no farming, account for three out of four of the rural dwellers today. During the last census period, the non-farm population increased by eighteen per cent, or more than the percentage rise of the metropolitan population. Statistics from the Economic Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture show that during the decade, the non-metropolitan manufacturing gain exceeded that of the metropolitan areas, and that forty-five per cent of the manufacturing jobs were in non-metropolitan areas, even though these places accounted for only a fourth of the total. Dr. Henry feels that regardless of the population losses in so many of the nation's counties there is a growing awareness of the potential of "a resurrected countryside."6

The apparent key to this resurrection lies with the towns that show an affinity for growth. The potential they possess is their ability to serve a hinterland, or in imitation of the metropolis. The aggregate form is a miniature metropolis, or as Dr. Henry calls it, a "micropolis."7 Like the metropolis, it operates under the theme of dominance and subdominance. Rather than the traditional competition between
towns and cities, the resurrection of the countryside may well depend upon the support of the larger town by the surrounding smaller towns. The best way to assure the "good life" of the countryside is to foster the growth of the larger urban places.

The "micropolis," then, is a second type of small town that exists in America. It, too, is isolated from the metropolis, but shows an ability to thrive on its own account. Whether it be from the possession of some natural resource, a strategic location in a transportation matrix, or the advantage of an institutional installation, these towns possess the potential for serving as the central core of a "micropolis." And yet, the intentional use of these towns to accomplish population dispersal or as an aid to towns which cannot make it alone, will require planning and technical expertise. The communities involved will have to be mobilized to do the job. A shift in the sense of community will be required. Smaller towns which are the traditional opponents of the larger towns, and are bound by their loyalties to their own community, must shift their alliance to the community of "micropolis." For the central town, there is the task of generating a spirit of aggressiveness sufficient to meet the challenges of "mother city."

For those towns which are destined to foster a full-fledged metropolis, there is the opportunity to plan for future growth and the accompanying responsibility. There may be a way to avoid some of the growing pains and "big city" ills of today's metropolitan areas. Again, there is the necessity of motivating the leadership of these
towns to prepare for their expanding role as policy-makers. The existing models of metropolitan communities are not sufficient patterns from which to plan the new metropolis. There must be innovation in the planning process, and this may mean accelerating the rate of change that will accompany the community's transition from small town to the central city of a metropolitan area.

It would serve the planner well, then, to understand better the attitudes of town people toward the change that is part of becoming a "micropolis" or a genuine metropolis. The planning innovation is likely to meet resistance from community leaders if there is no regard for their attitudes toward the changes occurring or toward the anticipated effects of future growth.

1130  A Metropolitan Component

Towns in the metropolitan areas of the U. S. show incredible rates of growth as the surge of metropolitan growth passes through their boundaries. As the Houston growth pattern extended to the southwest it swept through the small town of Missouri City during the 1960's. According to the 1970 census, the population of the town increased from six hundred people to more than four thousand, or an increase of nearly six hundred per cent. Such a growth rate may be exceptional rather than typical, and yet, rapid growth for the small town in a metropolitan area is common. The town may be enjoying its seclusion while still in easy access of commercial and cultural benefits of the central city; then, as if over night, the surge of growth reaches the town, and it is
"Boom City, U. S. A." The growth comes without solicitation. If the town's long-time residents do not want to be in "Boom City," they may zone out a substantial portion of the development within the corporate limits, but they cannot zone out the effects of the surrounding development. The school district must remain open to the increase in population. The downtown trade will suffer if there is a major shopping center constructed just beyond the city's control. Resistance can easily end up as a struggle for economic independence if the town persists in remaining a static island in a sea of change.

Metropolitan growth consumes vast amounts of land, including towns that have been independent communities. As these towns are absorbed into the physical fabric of the metropolis, their inhabitants are forced to face the subjugation of their communities to the metropolitan community. Regardless of the economic benefits that accompany the transition, there is still the problem of the effects of change upon the people. It is a problem that the responsible planner must face if he is to involve himself in planning for metropolitan growth.

Whether the planner shows any concern for the people of these towns or not, he is forced to recognize their existence, as they can provide major hindrances to metropolitan planning. There are many political jurisdictions that etch the surface of the metropolis, and many are a nuisance to planning efforts. The most troublesome are those of the small towns. A water district, school district, or a voting precinct can provide its own special headache, but the corporate limits of a
small town can literally punch holes in the best planning efforts. This becomes especially noticeable in a zoned city where its ordinances conflict with those of the towns surrounding it, or as in Houston, where the unzoned central city has grown around a zoned town which has truly become an island. Beyond the boundaries of the central city, there are towns which are destined to serve some special function in the metropolis -- possibly as the nucleus for a bedroom community or as a commercial or industrial service center. The confrontation with towns in these areas can be a special problem, as the planner lacks the little power he may possess within the jurisdiction of the city. The situation can become particularly frustrating if the small town resists any involvement in efforts which demand cooperation with the central city.

1140 The Need to Listen

The isolated small town which is faltering under pressures of urbanization deserves attention, if not for the capital investment it represents, for the people who are caught in a situation with few alternatives. The "micropolis" may be the hope of the small town that cannot make it alone. The dynamics of metropolitanism can possibly be put to use in the miniature. If the "micropolis" is on its way to becoming a metropolis, there is the opportunity for the planner to catch the dominant urban form in its infancy and plan for its future growth. Within the existing metropolitan areas there is the need for the planner to involve himself with small towns in order to ease his task of dealing with metropolitan growth, and to assure that his planning efforts
reflect sensitivity to the people of these towns.

With each type of town it seems essential that its people be listened to. With each, the inhabitants' attitudes toward their circumstance is crucial to the success of any planning efforts. If the declining isolated town is to be provoked into taking a progressive approach to its problems, then its leaders must be motivated. The leaders of the potential "micropolis" must also be motivated to exercise the proper responsibilities to their extended role if there are to be cooperative efforts between the largest town and the smaller towns that have been traditional competitors. The same is true of towns within the metropolis. How can the planner execute a plan for development within the metropolis that necessitates cooperation among its components, if he is oblivious of the attitudes and perceptions of the people of these towns?

It is the last type of town, the metropolitan component, that serves as the case study for this work. Conroe, Texas, as a component of the Houston metropolitan area, is undergoing transition in its economic structure, its community composition, and its political climate. The economic dominance of the oil industry has given way to real estate. The downtown is forced to share its retail trade with the new shopping centers. The city must provide unprecedented municipal services to an expanding population. New problems place a strain upon the existing government and introduce proposals for dramatic political changes which threaten local political autonomy. The local structure is forced
to examine its problems in light of a community much larger than it was intended to serve, and town and county are faced with the challenge of being able to control a relentless surge of urbanization. To Conroe, and many such metropolitan small towns, metropolitanism, in all its gift-bearing array, is still a bone of contention between a way of life and a force of change.
Conroe provides an example of a small town being drastically affected by urbanization. So drastic is its transition from a rural county seat to a sub-community of the Houston metropolitan area, that it is like a sped-up motion picture of a town's response to growth and change. In a very short time it has allowed me to be involved in and record for this work some of the community's responses which are most representative of their attitudes and perceptions of the effects of the transition.

As county seat of Montgomery County, Conroe is a part of the Houston Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). As part of the Houston SMSA, Conroe was able to share in the metropolitan area's phenomenal growth. Between 1960 and 1970, the Houston SMSA population increased by forty per cent, which means that half a million people were added to its population during the decade. Conroe was destined to share eventually in this kind of growth, but the county has some natural attractions which have increased the development pace in the northern part of the SMSA.

In 1971, "revenoors" of the Texas Alcoholic Beverages Commission found nearly a third of the state's total illicit whiskey stills in the Montgomery County area. If available tree cover is a prime determinate of a still's location, then the county would be a logical choice. Eighty-
four per cent of its total land area still remains in timber. These trees have attracted not only the "moonshiners," but also an increasing proportion of the residential construction in the Houston SMSA. During the last census period 163 new sub-divisions were recorded in the county, with half that number in the last four years of the 1960's. Subdivision development patterns have closely followed the pattern of tree growth in its spread from Houston to the Montgomery County area, even to the point of skipping over closer but less-wooded areas.

The fact that a residential development pattern can skip less desirable territory implies the advantage of a high level of mobility. Interstate Highway 45 has provided that mobility. As it leaves Houston and slices its way through the trees of Montgomery County on its way to Dallas, it passes within a mile of downtown Conroe. Its ability to carry large volumes of traffic at high rates of speed has made Houston available to the commuters who feel anything less than an hour's drive to work is acceptable. This has meant that regardless of Conroe's location in the middle of the county, it is being gradually surrounded by sub-divisions catering to Houston workers.

The available land in the northern part of the Houston SMSA has not only attracted new suburban development, but other major generators of activity which have proved to be additional attractors of further residential growth in and around Conroe. In 1970, Houston's Intercontinental Airport was opened. The new facility has supplanted Hobby Airport in almost all commercial airline traffic. It lies in Harris County, but
it is only a fifteen to twenty minute drive from Conroe. Around its perimeter, a large industrial park is being developed -- another attraction to residential growth. Under construction a few miles northwest of Conroe, is Lake Conroe, a 21,000 acre lake. It is being formed on the San Jacinto River which runs north to south through the county. Due to its interest in the water supply of the lake, Houston is joining the San Jacinto River Authority in the construction process. Almost every week for the last few months of 1971, and the first of 1972, there has been a new sub-division announced on or near the lake. And these are permanent homes, not vacation houses. Houston will be only an hour's drive from the lake.

While the town of Conroe is just beginning to feel the full impact of the building surge from the south, the sub-divisions outside the city limits are increasing in density as well as in number. Nor is the building growth limited to areas outside the city limits. In 1961, building permits for the city were just over three-quarters of a million dollars. Ten years later, the figure had grown to almost seven million dollars. According to the maps on the wall of the city administrator, there were over one thousand apartment units under construction or planned for construction as of January 1972. Once occupied, this number of apartments alone could mean a twenty-five per cent increase in the city's population.

Of course as the residential development has flourished, commercial development has increased. Primarily this has been in the form of
strip centers along the major roads leading to Conroe, but there are also two shopping centers which provide significant competition to the retail trade of the downtown. Here and in other strategic locations about town, the local merchants are being introduced to the sales tactics of "big city" chain stores and discount houses. The inevitable short-order franchise drive-in restaurants are popping up beside new gasoline stations or close to the shopping centers. The town has no zoning ordinance, and its developmental pattern is limited only to what the market will bear, and the economic picture for Conroe looks bright.

As an indication of the economic growth to the county and city, bank deposits have shown an incredible increase during the past years. Twenty-five years ago the city's one bank had deposits of less than five million dollars. This bank today is the largest in the county with deposits totaling over thirty-nine million dollars. During 1971, its deposits increased nearly twenty-five per cent over those of 1970. Combined with the two other banks now in the city, the total deposits exceed the sixty million dollar mark. Add to these figures the deposits of the county's other two banks operating during the year, and the county's 1971 total was just under seventy-three-and-a-half million dollars. The growth rate of the banks' composite total exceeded the state's average by five per cent. 14

Another indicator of the city's economic growth is the increase in the city's sales tax. The tax has been in effect only since January 1970, but compared with the returns for that year the figures are impressive.
The first quarter's returns for 1970 were a little over fifty-one thousand dollars. The returns for the third quarter of 1971 were nearly ninety-thousand dollars, or an increase of better than fifty-seven per cent.15

From September 1971 to February 1972, the city has been faced with questions of annexation, disputes with utility companies over rate increases, and the threat of a new town only five miles from the heart of the downtown. During this period county officials have been faced with the questions of the new town, a dispute with the San Jacinto River Authority over replacement of county roads inundated by the new lake, and the problems of a courthouse too small for an expanding county administration plus a county hospital with faulty foundations and inadequate capacities. The school district faced with a burgeoning school population has seen a fifteen million dollar bond issue, already approved by the voters, held up by a nation-wide court decision on school funding.

Regardless of these problems of growth and change, and whether the locals of Conroe like it or not, there is sure to be more of the same and most likely at an increased rate. The rate of growth of the Houston SMSA has been very rapid and is expected to continue that way. It now contains 17.7% of the state's population, as compared to 14.8% in 1960.16 While Montgomery County had less than fifty thousand people in 1970, the 1990 population is projected to go as high as four-hundred thousand.17 If such an increase is plausible, that gives city and
county fathers less than twenty years to prepare for an eight-fold increase in population.

Montgomery County experienced its greatest rate of growth during the Depression. Just at the time the county’s lumber industry appeared to be on the decline, and the effects of the Depression were threatening, oil was discovered in the southern part of the county. In 1932, after a couple of years of unsuccessful attempts, a man named Strake tapped the "black gold" and assured the county and Conroe a booming economy during a time when most of the nation was struggling to survive. For Conroe the boom meant that "Within thirty days after December 13, the population had jumped from less that twenty-five hundred to a number estimated from five thousand to fifteen thousand." Montgomery County was unique during the Depression and it is still particularly favored today. Until very recently, the oil industry had supported eighty per cent of the Conroe Independent School District’s operating budget. Today the county's primary boost to its economy is not nearly so simple or direct, but comes in the complex form of the dynamics of the Houston metropolis. As part of the Houston Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), the county is one of forty-one counties in the twenty-four SMSA's in the state of Texas. It and only forty-seven other counties have consistently shown increases in population since 1930. Of these forty-eight counties, twenty-three are in SMSA's and another sixteen are adjacent to metropolitan counties.
Even more significant to Montgomery County's favored location, is the fact that the Houston SMSA was one of the state's six which accounted for ninety per cent of the total population growth between 1960 and 1970 in the state.\textsuperscript{21}

Indicative of the rural-urban migration, all but twenty-nine of the state's counties did show a natural increase in population in the last census, but still there was a net loss in 146 of the total 254 counties.\textsuperscript{22} There were actually only 72 counties which showed a net increase in population in the 1970 census due to immigration, and of course, the bulk of these counties was in or around the metropolitan areas.\textsuperscript{23} In that census there were only fifty-nine counties classified as having a predominately rural population.

Based upon a composite of growth statistics, the Southwest Center for Urban Research developed a map of economic growth trends in the state of Texas evident in 1970. A county's economic growth is determined by a composite of its assessed valuation, income total, bank deposits, scholastic population and total population. Of the top twenty counties, fourteen were located in SMSA's and two more were contiguous to those counties. The metropolitan area's dominance of the state's economic growth is graphically evident in this map presentation.

These statistics, show that a small minority of the total number of counties account for the state's rate of growth in both population and economic figures. Those counties losing population and experiencing
TEXAS: ECONOMIC GROWTH TRENDS
economic declines are those outside the metropolitan areas. Because of the dynamics of metropolitanism, the ability of these counties to stop or redirect its effects upon them is doubtful unless some state of federal policy is enacted which provides the necessary assistance. From all indications, the growing counties are destined to continue to grow and prosper as a part of metropolitanism in the state of Texas.

1230 Metropolitanism and the Small Towns of Texas

Just as they had done when the 1960 census information was released, some of the representatives of Conroe spoke out against what surely must have been a mistake in the population total given the city in the 1970 census. The census count gave the city a population of only 11,969.24 Regardless of the growth this figure represented (a 30.2% increase for the decade), those complaining felt there were thousands more who had been overlooked by the census takers. Actually the growth these people must have been referring to was outside the city limits of Conroe. The southern part of the county claimed the majority of the decade's growth.

Conroe's concern over the accuracy of the census count might seem strange to the inhabitants of other Texas towns who have seen nothing but decline in their population numbers for the last couple of census counts. The town which is suffering population loss would appear to be reaping all the negative effects, and the "Conroes" of the state are gaining all the benefits. Considering the 1970 census of population within the state, and ignoring the significance of location,
one finds a direct correlation between the size of a town and its chances of showing population loss. For illustration I have selected three categories of population range: towns with a population of 2,500 to 10,000; 10,000 to 25,000; and 25,000 to 50,000. Of over two hundred towns in the first category, forty per cent had lost population during the census period. Only a little over twenty-six per cent of the total towns in the second category showed losses. And then, for those towns larger than 25,000 people, the percentage of loss was barely fifteen per cent. From these statistics it would appear that towns in the first category are hardest hit by the population shifts in the state. Conroe would have been in this category in 1960.

Of course the significance of a town's location cannot be ignored in comparing the characteristics of those growing in population and those declining. Conroe may have been in the first category, but it was located in a metropolitan area. With the results of the 1970 census, it was placed among the ranks of some ninety-four other Texas towns with a population of 10,000 to 50,000. Of this number, better than forty per cent had a population increase between 1960 and 1970 that exceeded the overall state increase of just under seventeen per cent. Twenty-seven of these towns, or two-thirds, were located in one of the state's SMSA's, and five others were in counties adjoining metropolitan areas. Of the seven towns which had population increases that exceeded the state's percentage increase and yet were located outside a SMSA, two were within an hour's drive of a major growth
Four were grouped by two's with only fifteen miles separating one town from the other. The combined population of the two in each case exceeded 50,000 people, which could be indicative of its capacity to approximate a metropolitan area. The one remaining town was on the Mexico border with the next major highway entrance to the country more than a hundred miles further south. All these statistics clearly point out the concentration of the state's population increases in the metropolitan areas. By 1970, seventy-three and one-half per cent of the state's total population was in the twenty-four SMSA's.27

Of the ninety-five towns between 10,000 and 50,000 population, twenty-four per cent experienced population loss. Eighty per cent of these towns were located within a SMSA or in a county adjacent to a metropolitan area.28 This finding reflects a new characteristic in metropolitanism in the state of Texas. No longer is a town's potential for growth assured by being a part of a metropolitan area or being in the right size category. During this last census period, six SMSA's actually lost population. Three cities with a population of over 100,000 lost population, as did six cities of over 50,000 population.29 Only the cities and suburbs in the major metropolitan areas, like Houston, had population percentage gains exceeding that of the state. With the exception of incorporated enclaves in cities like West University Place and Bellaire in Houston, most of the towns which had population losses and yet were in SMSA's were located outside the six major growth centers of the state. Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, El Paso and Austin and their SMSA's accounted for ninety
per cent of the state's total growth between 1960 and 1970. This continued increase in urban concentration within the state can only mean a continued imbalance between those towns within and those without the major growth centers.

Regardless of the population concentration in the state, there are still more than half the residents of Texas living in places of less than 100,000, and half that number in places of less than 25,000. Also, more than twenty-five per cent live outside the SMSA's. Whether they are residents of towns in the metropolitan areas that are undergoing tremendous rates of change, or of towns remote from the major population concentrations, these people are confronted with changes that are brought about by metropolitanism within the state as a whole. The rate and the effects of those changes may differ from town to town, but the residents' response to the changes is still a result of their composite attitudes and perceptions of that change. It is from the response of the leadership in Conroe that I will draw examples of how their attitudes and perceptions affect the town's development.
FOOTNOTES


4 The Houston Chronicle, October 14, 1971, Section I, p. 16.

5 Simon and Gagnon, p. 510


7 Ibid., p. 2.

8 1970 Census Data for the Houston Area (Houston: The Houston Chamber of Commerce, 1971) p. 11.

9 Ibid., p. 3.

10 The Conroe Courier, Conroe, Texas, January 19, 1972.


14 Ibid., January 9, 1972.


16 The Houston Chronicle, September 29, 1971, Section 5, p. 17.
17 Long Range Road Development Plan for Montgomery County (Austin: City of Conroe, Montgomery County, and the Texas Highway Department, 1970) p. 5.


19 Oltha Reaves, Personal interview, February 8, 1972.

20 The Houston Chronicle, October 14, 1971, Section I, p. 16.


22 Ibid., p. 15-16.

23 Ibid., p. 18.


25 Ibid., pp. 11-17.

26 Ibid., pp. 18-21.

27 Ibid., p. 5.

28 Ibid., p. 18-21.


30 Ibid.

2000

URBANIZATION AND THE PEOPLE OF SMALL TOWNS
As technology in the United States has advanced and the American society has grown more complex and interdependent, social scientists have evolved their definition of community.

The most general change in the theory of community is the reevaluation of the importance of locality for community. Older and newer concepts of community can be distinguished: the first emphasizes the importance of territorial anchorage of community; the second reduces territory to a secondary (even at times dispensable) attribute of community, emphasizing, rather the unity of the system of common life.

This common system of life can be extended to a very broad front, as indicated by the title of Don Martindale's book, Small Town and the World. This world system is broader than necessary for this study, and I am inclined to place my community emphasis along the lines of community researcher Lois Dean, who found in field research that, "from the social-psychological point of view, most Americans do not live in the 'nation' or 'the total society'; they live in towns and cities." As my concern is for the implications of community theory for the planning process, I am more inclined not to dismiss the spatial aspect of community, but instead to explore a community definition which includes the spatial quality. Robert Dentler's concept of community does this; place remains very real in today's complex social structure.

He states that the main element of community is interdependence; that,
in part, community is an organization of social activities; and that where there is repeated social interaction, there is the first sign of community. Then, added to this, community exists somewhere; it can be distinguished from other communities by its physical setting; and its size and design is such that a great range of functions can be carried out within its boundaries. It is a place where most of the economic, political, religious, and familial institutions are found around which people are joined together. These institutions are larger and smaller than any single community, and may be common to many different communities. The total network of institutions in America is the national society. And finally a community, "is a nexus -- a point in a terrain where society, culture, and individuals meet."  

By this concept, community is the social interaction of people in a physical setting around the various institutions which are essential to its functioning. It is distinguished from the partial community by its range of functions and social positions. The resort community, with only its vacationing populace, is not a community, nor is a new housing development that is dominated by young married couples. Anthropologist Conrad Arensberg puts it this way:

First, then, a community is representative....If the culture knows two sexes, several ages, several classes, several sects, several ethnic groups....several of many....specializations, then the community....must have some at least of all these people, enough to man at least minimally their roles and statuses.

Second, it must give us these people, this table of organization, in some repetition and continuance. The personnel must be joined, in a succession of lives.
With such a definition, and in our increasingly complex society it is becoming more difficult for anything smaller or less comprehensive than the central city and its satellite small towns and dormitory communities to comprise a full community. The spatial design of the metropolitan area with its concentrated core and its surrounding partial communities, then, reflects the spatial quality of today's community. Conroe is in the process of becoming a partial community to the larger community of the Houston metropolitan area. This transition implies that it was something more prior to its subjugation to Houston, and that in this transition it will lose some of those characteristics which had made it function as an independent community.

"The distinctive community form of the South was and is the county. Dispersed a day's ride in and out around the county seat, that community assembled planter and field or house-hand from the fat plantations, free poor white or Negro from the lean hills and swamps, for the pagentry and the drama of Saturdays around the Courthouse, when the courthouse, the jail, the registry of deeds, and the courtsquare of shops and lawyers' row made a physical center of the farflung community."

While this romantic notion of county seat may be a little rich for Conroe, as it has only been the county seat since the 1930's, there is something special about the county seat, especially in the South; and Conroe is very much a part of the South. It has its Negro sections of town, its stories of lynchings on the square, and it did vote for George Wallace in the 1968 presidential election. As evidenced by the people's attitudes and its obvious economic dominance of the county, the town has been a community center in the eyes of both city and county residents. In my search for attitudes and perceptions that affect development in the town, I have been involved in the
people's reactions to this changing community role -- changes brought about by the impact of the larger community.

2120 The Pressure of Urbanization

The pressures of urbanization upon the small town have been recorded in the works of social scientists for at least the last fifty years. The classic work of the husband and wife team, the Lynds, *Middletown and Middletown in Transition*, done over a ten year period in the 1920's and 1930's, traces the effects of industrialization upon community life. In the mid-thirties, Lloyd Warner documented the effects of bureaucratization, the organizational concomitant of industrialization, in *Yankee City*, a small factory city. In both these studies one finds the first signs of the changes brought about in the small community by the introduction, from the outside, of new systems of technology which have drastic effects upon the community's social stability. Later, in the 1950's, Vindich and Bensman record the effects of urbanization upon a small community in *Small Town in Mass Society*. It was observed that the most successful residents of the community were linked to the outside, or "mass society." In all these studies, there is the struggle between the local and non-local forces. Still later, in the 1960's, in *Five Towns*, Lois Dean added to the concept of the local community's relation to the larger society, when she noted that not only might the successful individuals of a community be those linked with the larger society, but that a community's conception of the outer world is dependent upon its functional systems of linkage with the larger society.
Within all these studies, there is the underlying conclusion that "economic activities and norms are all-prevailing in American society."

Lois Dean concludes that:

Hence, the economic structure of the local community defines its ethos, or character, and conditions its members' values and social attitudes more profoundly than any other single institution. In common parlance, for instance, we speak of mining towns, mill towns, or railroad towns, on the assumption that they possess social characteristics that readily distinguish among them.

She continues with:

For value and attitude formation and reinforcement, the most important aspects of community economic structure are the type of economic activity that predominates and the functional linkage between the local and national communities.

From these studies of the effects of urbanization upon community structure in the small town come two important aspects which are pertinent to this search for attitudes and perceptions which affect development in the small town. First is the concept that the forces for change in the small town are from the outside, and that the town's struggle with the changes are best characterized as a conflict between local and non-local forces. Second is the concept that a community's values and attitudes are, to a large part, shaped by its form of economic activity and the functional linkages it has with the larger society.

In Conroe there are numerous examples of outside forces affecting the community. For the six months of my involvement with the community, the city was involved in a dispute with the regional power company serving the town. The company had hoped to get a uniform
rate increase throughout its East Texas area, but the city would approve only a fraction of the requested increase. At the time of this writing, the whole dispute was shelved by a national "freeze" on private utility company rate increases -- a national society impact.

As for the economic activity of the community, the oil industry has been dominant in the county and in affecting Conroe. But for its impact upon the fiscal structure of the community, it has been like a silent partner. It could hardly be said to shape the community's attitudes of the larger society, except indirectly, as through making a better school system available for the children. Until recently the "functional linkages" have been through a few individuals or via its institutions, such as those of the county. Now, however, the city and county's dominant economic activity is its real estate and land development. Many residents of the community are directly involved in its activities through the sale of land they own, or through contact with those who are purchasing or developing properties. These people have become associated with some of the major developers of Houston. Construction of a nearby new town has brought contact with people active in development which has a direct linkage to national affairs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is involved with the new town because of the developer's application for a government loan. County and city officials have been flown to Columbia, Maryland by the developer to see an example of a new town of similar approach and scope. Such exposure to affairs of metropolitan and
national level has and will continue to have significant impact upon
community attitudes toward future change within the community.

2130 Leadership in a Small Town

Of all the misconceptions concerning life in the small town,
the question of leadership has perhaps suffered most. Even among
sociologists and political scientists there appears to be little
agreement either over how the leadership of a community might be
classified, or as to what the best method of identifying the leaders
might be. Sociologists assume that the political process is an
"organized system of action, a stable recurring process", and the
political scientists approach the question with the assumption of
"a collection of individuals" and focus their attention upon the
"political behavior of individuals."

In the early 1950's, sociologist Floyd Hunter developed the reputa-
tional approach for identifying community leaders. Basically, the
assumption is made that a leader's reputation of leadership among
his peers is sufficient evidence to classify him as a leader. This
method is associated with the elitist concept of leadership that
assumes that leadership is a "natural" function of status. Throughout
the 1950's many criticisms and many modifications of the reputational
method appeared. The method was sometimes combined with an identifi-
cation of those leaders in formal positions of local economic or
political-civic structure. By 1960, Nelson Polsby employed a version
of the reputational approach, but associated the leaders with specific
issues or activities in specific policy areas. The procedure was termed the pluralist method. Through this method he discovered that there was only a slight overlap of the leaders in the different issue areas. The basic difference between the original Hunter approach and this last evolution as exemplified by Polsby is clearest when it is seen that the first asks, "Who runs things here?", and the second, "Does anyone run things here?" 

From this evolution of studies of community power there comes the two concepts of elitist and pluralist leadership. The first is associated with the sociologist and the second with the political scientist. However, as Robert Schulze has said, "Where the sociologist found monopoly and called it elitism, political scientists found oligopoly but defined it in more honorific terms as pluralism....political scientist and sociologist, if not speaking with one tongue, may....be mouthing substantially the same observations." 

There is a consistency in their composite findings that has a bearing upon the leadership in Conroe. In a comparison made of the studies conducted on community power, Claire Gilbert found that there was a greater portion of the smaller cities that were controlled by informal leaders, or the non-professional politicians. On the other hand, a greater portion of the larger cities was controlled by professional politicians. The relation is assumed to be that the full-time politician is involved in the larger cities because the issues are so many and so complex. The fewer number of issues in the small town
allows businessmen and civic leaders to manage the affairs of the community. It follows that the concept of elitism is more easily associated with the small town, and the concept of pluralism with the larger cities. Informal leaders are defined as economic dominants, businessmen or professionals, or individuals motivated by high social values. Since they are an integral part of the community structure, it is logical to assume that members of the community would be reliable sources for discovering who the leaders of that community are, as did Floyd Hunter. In my search for community leaders, I simply wanted to identify those who held positions of responsibility, or those who had the reputation for responsibility, who would be instrumental in affecting development in the town. I have compiled a list of those with such a position or reputation from the separate lists of names given to me by people both inside and outside the community who were in a position to know. From the list it is apparent that the leadership, at least oriented to my specific concerns, is primarily in the hands of the informal leaders.
The Leaders and the Game

In my search for community leaders, I very early realized that the community I would be dealing with would not only be the town of Conroe, but Montgomery County as well. The town itself is the county seat, and if not for that reason alone, the Conroe residents feel their town is the center for the county community and its leadership. Among the list of leaders that I assembled, only the county judge would be truly representative of that portion of the community outside Conroe. There were no county commissioners' names given as influential in community development. Still, the bulk of the growth of the community has been outside the city limits of Conroe, and no doubt that has had its effect upon the leader's ready identification of the county as part of his community. Whether the leader was the city mayor or one of the leadership majority, a businessman or professional in town, each talked of the county as familiarly as he did of the town. There is no evidence to indicate that the county-wide community definition has always been so strong, but it is strong today. My use of the term community will be their own definition. The community is the county, and Conroe is the control center of that community.

It is easiest to understand the functioning of these leaders if a metaphor of the game of urbanization is developed. The game is scored by growth statistics. In the 1970 census, then, Montgomery County
won the state championship as the fastest growing county in the state. The leaders are the team members who are responsible for assuring a high score. There are shifts in this team as new leaders emerge and take their place on the first team. Others can't compete effectively anymore and are placed on reserve teams or are "sent to the showers." Regardless of the internal shifts of the team members, there is still the recent championship, and it is a position to be exploited. While there is the headiness of being on top, there is an uneasiness too. The championship was not really their doing. It is a matter of the leagues. There is much spin-off from being part of the Houston metro league. Being a part of the big league means giving up a lot of say over the game plan. There is not as much room for individual glory as in the smaller leagues.

What follows is a collection of responses involving the team members, or the leaders of the community. It is through their response to the various facets of the game that the game itself becomes clearest. The game that is the concern of this work is the one to which they respond -- the game they define by their attitudes. Through their attitudes, the leaders themselves become distinguishable, as they begin to discriminate how the game should be played or who should be on the first team. It is through their attitudes that the community transition is best understood. They are in the process of switching from the small town league to the major metropolitan league -- from the amateur to the professional. It entails a change more dramatic than adopting "The Miracle City" as a new team name to fit the new league.
Everyone I talked to in Conroe was proud of the community's ability to handle its growth and to keep ahead of its problems. I was told many times how the town had so easily integrated its schools. They had started at the high school level and still there had been no problems. The school district had never had a school bond issue defeated. There were some old-timers still in power, but they were all positive thinkers. There had been a power block in the community and even some dishonesty in county and city government, but both had been displaced. There was also the problem of the rural county commissioners and the antiquated county system, but the solution to that was only a matter of time. They do have a new county judge, and he is young, labeled a progressive, and is an attorney -- the first in more than ten years. The following three issues demonstrate the leaders' confidence.

In the spring of 1971, the Conroe Telephone Company applied to the city of Conroe for a rate increase. The increase was deemed necessary to meet the demands of a rapidly growing area. The city had no quarrel with this demand, for they had received numerous complaints of inadequacies of the phone service, and felt that an increase in the company's funds would improve their service. In response, the city turned the matter of justifying the amount of the requested rate increase over to a public utilities rate consultant. Several months
passed before the consultant made his report, and many more have passed since, but the city still has not approved the telephone company's request. The rate consultant's recommended rate increase was less than that requested by the company, and yet there were other differences that have delayed any action on the matter.

In the council's October meeting, the mayor read a letter of city "policy" as a reply to the phone company's request. The letter was actually a list of proposals that the city submitted as aids to the company's financial problems — proposals founded on the grievances between the city, the customer and the phone company. Among the proposals was the suggestion that the company move its headquarters from Lufkin, Texas to Conroe, and that the company make common stock available to Conroe investors. Both of these suggestions or proposals were received by the phone company as obvious threats on the part of the city to turn a private enterprise, regardless of its function as a public utility company, into a publicly managed company. They raised legal questions, especially concerning the city's desire that the company should favor the investment interest of Conroe, but foremost was the question of the city's right to involve itself with anything other than fixing the company's telephone rates.

My talk with one of the city's councilmen revealed that in part, the city's proposals might have been a bluff, but then, "Why shouldn't you ask for the grocery store, instead of a loaf of bread, when you know you're only going to get two slices anyway?" He went on to say
that the intent was to gain the city "more say in the affairs of the company." There was no one locally to whom they could direct their complaints, even if there was a local branch office of the company. Besides, the company should be located in the area of greatest growth potential. Lufkin was larger than Conroe, but it was dependent upon the Lufkin Foundry, so its growth was bound to stabilize, while Conroe could only continue to grow. Even if, as the company claims, the issuance of stock would not create any great demand on the stock market, there would be many people locally who would want to invest in the company because of the growth potential. He personally would be interested in investing a little money in the company.

The episode with the telephone company is only one of several in which the city has seen fit to take issue with outside interests which affect them locally. During the same time period, the city was asked to approve a rate increase for the Gulf States Utility Company. Again, the city's rate consultant found the company's requested rate was excessive, and the city stood firm on his recommendation -- that the city approve only a lesser rate increase. In a February 1972 council meeting, the city was confronted with a host of "experts" representing the utility company. These "experts" were national and inter-national level consultants, and the council members were obviously impressed. Still they held their position, consenting only to make the new evidence submitted available to their consultant, with final action depending upon his recommendations. No other city in the same Gulf States Utility region had so much as hesitated in approving the same rate
increase requested of the city of Conroe.

During this same council meeting, a representative from the Santa Fe Railway appeared before the council to reply to the city's concern over their engines blocking road traffic and over various other operating procedures which were considered a nuisance. The Missouri-Pacific Railway had previously made an informal visit to the mayor's office in response to a letter from the city expressing similar concerns. Both companies had delayed in replying to the city's request for a discussion of the matter, but had finally responded, as the mayor threatened legal action to get their attention.

In all three of these examples, the city had exerted itself as a local power to be dealt with. The growth of the community had given the city a confidence to deal with its own particular problems in the way it saw best. This attitude of confidence permeates all the affairs of the community, as I discovered in my interviews with community leaders. During the six months I observed Conroe, its leadership was not just reacting to its problems but was actively pursuing the community's interest and testing its advantages. They were the champs, and they knew it.

2222 First and Second Teams

There are, at the time of this writing, only the Conroe Federal Savings and Loan and the University Savings and Loan operating as savings and loan institutions in Conroe. In the fall of 1971, a group of
city and county residents announced that they would apply to the Texas Savings and Loan Commission for a state charter necessary for the operation of a third savings and loan institution. The hearing before the state commission was held in November in Austin to consider the request against possible opposition. There was opposition — from the two existing savings and loan institutions. Their argument was that there was not enough growth in the area to justify another institution.

The Conroe Federal Savings and Loan was originally formed by the officials of the First National Bank of Conroe, and in fact was housed in that bank's facility in the early part of its existence. Even today, many of its directors are also directors of the bank. The chairman of the board is the bank's president. By many, it is considered the "stepchild" of the bank. The University Savings and Loan is the younger and is the "outsider." It is a branch of the Houston-based University Savings and Loan. Even though Houston based, there was no contest over its entrance into the community. According to one version, "They sort of slipped in before anyone knew about it." Another version was, "We thought they would invest their money in the community." They had been disappointed; "All their money goes back to Houston."

On the other hand, everyone praised Conroe Federal for its contribution to the community. And yet, these two institutions joined forces to oppose the creation of a third savings and loan — a locally initiated institution. Why? The most obvious reason would be to avoid competition. This may hold true for the Houston branch, but Conroe Federal
is a federal association. As such, all its investors, including its founders, receive only the current rate of interest on their investment. This means that for this institution increased business would not mean any more money to the directors than to any of its savings account holders. Except maybe for the staff members who might receive increased salaries due to increased business, there would appear to be no direct connection between Conroe Federal's desire to keep out competition and its form of operation.

The newspaper speculated that the opposition of Conroe Federal was, "at least partly in retaliation for the new group's protest filed against a Conroe Federal branch office application."¹⁵ I was told by one of the Conroe Federal people that it was a case of "the shoe being on the other foot." It seemed to him that the new applicant group had opposed Conroe Federal's application for a branch office in the southern part of the county because of their fear that it would hurt the new group's chances of getting approval for the creation of the third savings and loan institution. In both instances the opposition has been based on differences in growth statistics.

Everyone in Montgomery County will agree that the county is experiencing a great deal of growth, but to just what degree became the question in the state hearings. When Conroe Federal made its application for the branch office, they presented ample evidence of the growth which would easily justify the proposed facility. And yet, when the application was made for the third savings and loan, they opposed it with claims
that there really wasn't that much growth. The representing attorneys were quick to challenge any evidence submitted by the new group as "hearsay" or object to "descriptive adjectives" such as "dynamic growth." However, according to one of the new group, the growth statistics they submitted with their application were actually claiming less than did Conroe Federal in its application for the branch office. And too, they opposed the new group with statistics pertaining to the city, rather than the county.

Again from one of the new group, there was the story of a similar incident involving the "bank people" which had taken place a couple of years earlier. A group of "Houston people" had applied for a national charter to open a bank in the southern part of the county. The two Conroe banks joined forces and opposed the application with similar claims of not enough growth to support another bank in the county. Their protest was sufficient to prevent the issuance of the charter, at least temporarily. Within a short time, the directors of the two local banks formed a group and applied to the state for a charter to open a third bank in Conroe. When they succeeded in getting the state's approval, the applicant group from Houston immediately flew to Washington, protested the previous decision affecting their application, and of course pointed an accusing finger at the new state bank. They were granted their charter the same day.

As the various stories were told, it became apparent to me that the representatives of the new group felt there was more behind the oppo-
sition to their application than either revenge for their earlier opposition or simply healthy competition. I began to hear talk of "power" and of the "old guard" or "the establishment". They felt, at least in part, that it was a resentment of their age; as most members of the group were of the "younger set," and too, there was a resentment about how easy it would be for them. There was the persistent attitude, that those people connected with Conroe Federal were jealously guarding their long-time hold on either the power represented by a financial institution, or on their economic dominance. One of the new group chose to illustrate the power aspect by telling the story of the power of one of the town's old families that ran a lumber mill and worked a great number of Blacks. As these Blacks would occasionally "get into a little trouble with the law on a Saturday night," the mill owners were always very interested in who held the position of county judge. A phone call to a "friendly" judge would assure the owners the return of their "boys" in time for work on Monday morning. To the Blacks this kind of connection was awesome, and each weekend's episode further indebted their souls to the "bossmen" who held such power. To the storyteller, then, it was this kind of power, this ability to exert power as easily as with a phone call, that the "old guard" felt reluctant to lose.

In more particular terms, both sides suggested certain "spin-off" benefits available through the savings and loan. Many of those who led the opposition against the new applicants were attorneys as well as directors of Conroe Federal. They handle the loans made by the
association, and the connection served them well in picking up additional business. It was also suggested that maybe some insurance business had been "slanted" from a connection with the institution. As might be expected, nobody connected with Conroe Federal felt power had anything to do with their opposition — it was purely a matter of fighting competition. One of the Conroe Federal people told me that there was the possibility that the association could convert from a mutual association to a stock holding corporation. There had been a suspension on such action since 1967, but there were signs that it might be lifted within the next two or three years. This would mean that if they could stall the creation of the third savings and loan that long, then Conroe Federal could make the conversion and then could start on even terms. If they could stall them off that long, it would even be worth spending twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars in attorneys' fees to contest the suspension. In that case it would be an economic issue for sure.

The local newspaper, in reporting on the hearings, depicted the mood of the hearing as a light-hearted and almost gay affair as the opposing sides, "..joked among themselves in a spirit of amiability." It is true the newspaper might have wanted to promote the "friendly neighbor" aspect of the participants, as several are community leaders; and yet in my talks with members of both sides of the contest I found a similar mood, as nobody really displayed any malice toward members of the other side. Even from the applicant group there was the comment that, "If I were in their position, I'd probably feel the same
way." Most finally concluded that it really was just a reluctance on the part of one side and a determination on the part of the other. "After all," as the bank president said, "if the merchants downtown were required to apply for a charter to start a new business, there would be the same kind of opposition."

If there truly is an amiability between the opposing sides, the ability of these people to compete with such comfort is due to the area's very special luxury. This is most apparent when one recalls that in the hearing arguments the growth statistics were handled with almost a playfulness. There is so much depth in the statistics that it's possible to slant them either way that suits the situation. For instance, for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce there are the top figures of growth to be used for promotion and advertising, such as the projected 1990 county population of 400,000 people. For those opposing an application for a competing bank there are the lower figures, but still high enough to justify the opposition's own outstanding economic portfolio -- in the case of Conroe Federal, their savings deposits for 1971 were up 29.7% from the previous year. Such an attitude toward growth statistics would hardly be possible for that small town not favored by location in a dynamic metropolitan area.

Whether or not the leaders of Conroe are fully aware of their very special situation, they demonstrate the ability to take advantage of it. The uniqueness of their growth statistics shapes their attitudes.
of competitiveness and allows them to remain amiable in a circumstance which ordinarily could cause personal conflicts between the competitors. The attitude was reflected in the comment of the director of Conroe Federal when he said, "Personally I feel there's room for another savings and loan...maybe two or three more." How can one get upset over a little competition when there is this kind of room to work in?

Not to be overlooked, however, is the attitude of the new group toward the "old guard." As previously suggested, many of those involved in the savings and loan issue are community leaders. The chairman of the board and one of the directors of Conroe Federal, and the chairman and secretary of the proposed Montgomery County Savings and Loan appear among the top ten leaders identified in my survey. The savings and loan issue revealed another distinction among community leaders. Not everybody saw the issue as a defense of power, but those who did were the younger leaders who saw themselves as breaking into a heretofore closed economic-power network. By envisioning themselves outside this network, they have set themselves apart from the older established leaders. The self-imposed distinction could become a source of conflict if the big, soft economic padding becomes thin, or if the accepted rate of change is so different between the two groups that it becomes a point of strain in their day to day functioning as community leaders.

The game of urbanization is being defined by the formal leaders through municipal power plays and by the informal leaders through personal
economic leverage. The growth potential promotes the attitudes of confidence to control external pressures and amiability to handle internal competition.
In October of 1971, an attorney representing George Mitchell and Associates of Houston, asked the Houston City Council to extend the city's extra-territorial jurisdiction into Montgomery County to include some seventeen thousand acres on which the firm planned to build a new town. As the Montgomery County judge tells it, "We didn't know anything about it until we woke up one morning to read about it in the newspaper." It was not that he personally was unaware of plans for the new town, but the request to Houston was a surprise. There were plenty of other city and county residents who were not "in" on the plans for the town, so it was a double shock for these people. Within the week of the news release, the County Planning Commission Chairman had written a "strongly-worded letter" to the Houston-Galveston Area Council asking them to hold up Mitchell's request to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a fifty million dollar loan. The complaint was centered around the developer's not having followed "proper channels" in submitting plans for county approval, which would have been more of a courtesy than a requirement. On the Monday following the news release the Montgomery County Commissioners Court meeting was scheduled to be held. The local newspaper capitalized on the situation and forecast the meeting as one of "Mystery and Drama," as the "Conroe-Houston Battle" took shape. The Conroe mayor was quoted as saying, "We want to cooperate with developers, but we want to see that they don't stifle the city's ability to expand," and, "We will protect our city's interest
within our extra-territorial jurisdiction." The real drama for the meeting was that George Mitchell himself, and some of his planning staff were to have appeared before the court to explain their plans for the new town and the request to Houston.

As it turned out, Mitchell failed to make the meeting held that Monday morning, but did meet informally with city and county officials that afternoon and described his "vision of the total-concept 'Super City'." At this meeting it was pointed out by the Mitchell people that they were not asking the city of Houston to extend its city limits into Montgomery County, but only its extra-territorial jurisdiction and that was to include only his site. He explained how the development must be protected from incorporation by a "handful of people," so that design goals might be achieved. In refutation of the newspaper's billing for the issue, Mitchell went on to say that the real issue was not a confrontation between Houston and Conroe, but that his master plan be given the chance to be carried out without premature incorporation.

By Friday of that week, things may have been less confused, but there was still resistance as the county commissioners met to decide whether or not to give the county's approval to the project which would help the Mitchell group obtain the HUD loan. The chairman of the county's planning commission appeared before the commissioners to ask them to pass a resolution opposing further encroachment of Houston into Montgomery County. He based his appeal on the fact that, "The city moving
northward is going to affect county planning,"\textsuperscript{22} and that the County Planning Commission had gone on record in its meeting of that week as opposed to Houston's control of the Mitchell property. According to most, there was really no such action taken by the Commission, but it was of little matter, as the county judge urged the commissioners not to take a stand on the question of the extra-territorial jurisdiction. He said that if the city of Conroe was not planning to counter Houston by extending their own extra-territorial lines, then the county was helpless to do anything anyway. Finally, the court did pass a resolution calling for approval of the HUD loan, but one commissioner remained opposed. He claimed that he was not against the developer, but, "I'm just against this Houston deal."\textsuperscript{23} Within a few days of the county's resolution, the HGAC went on record as approving the plans for the new town.

The prevalent attitude in Conroe of wanting to keep Houston out of the county is not founded on an ignorance of the county's and city's growth being dependent upon that of Houston. There are slight variations of just when this dependence began, ranging from the time of the completion of the interstate, some nine years ago, to around five years ago, but most all agreed that they are now ninety to ninety-five per cent dependent. Examples given were the new lake and the largest and newest sub-divisions. As a local attorney said, "There wouldn't have been a Lake Conroe if it weren't for Houston." The Episcopal priest who had seen his congregation grow dramatically in the last three years, said, "Seventy-five per cent of my congregation
work in Houston." Nor is there much reluctance in making direct economic connections with Houston. One of the local banks is presently awaiting the final action upon its merger with a Port Authur and Houston bank to form a holding company. And at the first part of 1972, a city councilman sold his glass and mirror business to a national concern whose largest branch is located in Houston. Instead of being owner, he is now the manager, but he has gained a strong connection in Houston. It is to this councilman that one of the representatives of the new town referred as "wearing two hats."

With his Chamber of Commerce hat, he welcomed the new town with open arms. But then he would turn around, put on this other hat, and champion the cause of keeping Houston out of the county. The councilman did tell me that he prefers to see a metropolitan government system rather than see Houston extend its city limits into the county. He would "do anything to keep out Houston."

There is a kind of comradeship between the Conroe community and the suburbanites of the county in their mutual fear of Houston's encroachment, and yet their fears have different bases. In my interview with the county judge, he read to me excerpts from a letter he had received that day. The letter was from a man who lived in the southern part of the county, in an area that had been annexed by the city of Houston. His lament was that he had to pay city taxes, but received few city services in return. He was supplied with no city water, nor was he on any city sewer line. And yet, he even had to pay the city an annual fee for the right to use his septic tank. Everyday, as he drove to
Houston to work, he was forced to drive on poorly maintained roads. To him, the situation was intolerable, and he asked the judge to help him in anyway he could. To the judge, the letter expressed the basic concern of most of the suburbanites — the fear of being annexed by Houston and being forced to pay taxes for services which would be years in coming.

For the leaders of Conroe, the threat of Houston does not lie so much with the fear of taxes; after all, they pay city taxes. The threat comes in the inevitable loss of control. As one councilman put it, "If we become part of Houston, it would take us fifty years to have any voice in city affairs." Beyond the desire to have a voice in their own affairs, there are the suspicions of big city government, as voiced by another community leader, "The (Houston) mayor is obviously a crook; I can't understand why the newspapers haven't done something about it." The influx of the new people to the county does not seem to pose this threat of loss of control to local leaders, as evidenced by their attitude toward the new town. Few felt that it would be a threat to their political dominance in the county. Some took comfort in the fact that the residents would not be allowed to incorporate. They would lack the necessary nucleus to form a political body. While there are complaints of the existing suburbanites' political apathy, there is some comfort to be found there as well. As one local said, "If it weren't for the apathy of the new residents in the southern part of the county, Conroe would have already lost its political dominance.

Community leaders react differently to the threat of Houston's encroach-
ment even though they all share the concern. To a few, when faced with the threat, there was but one course of action: prevent Houston's penetration into the county by opposing the new town. To those who are called "progressive," the matter of the threat was not nearly so simple, nor the necessary action so obvious. From my talks with several of these leaders, their logic seemed to run something like the following reconstruction. True, the new town had associated itself with Houston, but it was not that the city limits were to be extended into the county -- only the extra-territorial jurisdiction, and then, only within the new town site. And too, there was logic behind the developer's appeal to Houston. With small town politics the way they are, the city council might be swayed by the appeal of the new town residents for incorporation rights. Houston couldn't be so easily swayed. Regardless of some of the commissioners' references to that "village down the road," the new town is a totally planned city. It can mean a great deal to the county. Plus, the developer is concerned for environmental protection. That property was destined to be developed anyhow, and this developer was probably the best man to do the job.

With this logic, then, the county judge urged the commissioners to wait on the city. When the city took no action, the county passed the resolution approving the new town, with only the protest of the planning commission chairman and the one commissioner. Most will agree that they probably could have caused enough uproar to create trouble for the developer in his application for the HUD loan, but they didn't want to -- they wanted the new town. It was just Houston
they were concerned about.

The idea of an encroaching Houston seems to be on everybody's mind north of the Montgomery-Harris County line. As illustrated, it's one thing that draws the people of Conroe and the people of the surrounding sub-divisions together. It is what brought the people of the Porter Heights community before Conroe City Council to ask for the right to incorporate. And it's what links the "progressives" of the community with those more provincial. Only a few get belligerent over the subject, and that depends upon how urgent they feel the situation to be. As suggested by the new town issue, just how one reacts to Houston's encroachment might be the distinguishing factor between the "progressive" leaders and those labeled as rural or provincial. The planning commission chairman had been involved in county affairs for some time. To some in the community, he had hopes of capturing the new county engineer's post. In the case of the new town he made the mistake of getting emotional about the issue of Houston. When the county engineer's post was filled, it was not by him. When the new members of the county planning commission were appointed by the judge, a "progressive," not only was he not the director of the commission, but he was not even a member. There is a new demand for sophistication as governmental problems become more complex.

The possibility of larger governmental systems is a concern of the leaders. To some, it is an obvious future necessity, and to others,
more of a current trend in governmental affairs. For one of the oldest community leaders, the trend is a snow-balling one. He feels the community will be a part of a state or federal system before becoming a part of a Houston metropolitan system. "Either way he damn sure was going to fight it." When it comes to local control, however, there really is not that much difference between young and old leaders. One of the "progressives" felt the Council of Governments was an obvious effort to destroy local government. To him, COG was only an alternate form of metropolitan government. Another "progressive" bemoaned the possibility of the community's becoming a part of a Houston metro government system. He "sure as hell would hate to see it happen," and besides, "If the people of Conroe are afraid of Houston, how would they react to a metropolitan government?" Also, "Houston couldn't handle its own affairs, much less extend its control." The local newspaper has not been lax in its support for local control either. In the case of the newly created county health district, it was reported that it was in part "a move to forestall the city of Houston imposing its own regulations on the county...." The creator of the district, the county judge, told me that this had nothing to do with it, but still the newspaper chose to report it in that light. Later, in an editorial, the newspaper praised the county's action, saying that it would give the control to them rather than to Houston with "...its 'Big Brother' territorial controls or to state and federal agencies." Each leader had his own particular version of the prospects for federal
involvement. Before I could finish the question, one leader began
shaking his head and saying he didn't want anything to do with it.
As it turned out his main concern was with the impact of federal
money through government installations or related projects. "Sure,
the money could mean a great deal to a town's growth, but then look
what happens when this money is withdrawn." He used Dallas and Fort
Worth as examples. They were in a slump because of a government
cut-back. When we talked of the possibility of using a government
program like Urban Renewal to aid the declining situation downtown,
he responded with the question, "Why should the federal government
spend money helping them...they weren't a disaster area....why should
the taxpayer's money be used to help them." Even if, as I proposed,
it meant the complete collapse of the downtown, he still would be
opposed. If the merchants allowed it to get that bad, then they
deserved the outcome. But, then, there was a difference in obtaining
government funds through urban renewal and where federal involvement
is simply a matter of financing. There was, he understood, an apart-
ment project north of town that was being financed through the govern-
ment, and, "that was all right."

This particular reaction was the most resistant to federal involvement
that I encountered, and yet no one advocated its involvement, but rather
admitted it would be harder and harder to avoid as their problems
compounded. But even then, this involvement would be only to the
point of obtaining federal funds. One leader felt that the acceptance
of federal programs would be a long time in coming. There had been
resistance to the use of federal funds in the city's use of federal money in their recent utility improvements. The newspaper had its say about the question of federalism in an editorial concerning the school system. The piece was entitled, "Local School Control a Must," and in its contents the newspaper warned state and local authorities that if they didn't develop a sound and equitable system of financing the federal government would, "...step in and take over..."^26

To some, the concept of local control was more structured than just a system of free enterprise. The new city administrator felt the city should employ a zoning ordinance, that, "It's the only way to control development." And yet, when we talked of using the Urban Renewal program, he was quick to point out that it would require a Workable Program, and this in turn would mean that a federal housing project would not require the city's approval. He went on to say that this fact had been slipped past the Houston city council in the Model City program.

While the city administrator is new to the community, and his desire for the use of a zoning ordinance isn't a reflection of the other community leaders, many did see themselves as "loosening up," even to the prospects of federal involvement. One equated his changing racial attitude with his total "liberalizing." It does seem that in the idea of accepting federal involvement, there is a traditional heritage that is almost as strong as the attitude of race. As we talked of his "liberalizing," this leader said that he knew a great many black people,
some he worked with, ate with, and would shake their hands; but he still did not want to have them at his parties. Most community leaders still do not want to get too involved with the federal government either.

The stakes of the game are defined by the leaders' attitudes. They are receptive to big government benefits, but not at the expense of local control. The impact of growth has accentuated the leaders sense of territory and challenged their ability to control it. The urban pressures that are a part of being a metropolitan component require new sophistication. If local leaders cannot perform in the big league they are eliminated.

2232 The Game Plan

In a January 1972 city council meeting, representatives of Panorama, a residential development five miles north of the city of Conroe appeared before the council to request that the city waive its extra-territorial jurisdiction rights over the sub-division so that it might incorporate. The request was accompanied by a petition bearing fifty names of community residents. Among the reasons for the request was the desire for an "identity." They resented the fact that the community was caught between the city of Conroe on the south and that of Willis on the north. Their mail went to one address and their children went to school at another. They also felt the need to have the power to pass ordinances which would assure property upkeep and proper maintenance of streets and drainage ditches. They were sure
that their property values would drop if they could not find the means to assure such protection. The representatives did give the city the option of either waiving their jurisdiction or taking the community into Conroe's city limits. This would mean that the city would be responsible for all the community's services, as the spokesmen emphasized.

A few years earlier, the city had been faced with a similar problem from a community some seven miles east of the city. In that case the city advised the representatives to hold the election necessary to approve the incorporation with the promise that the city would waive the extra-territorial jurisdiction affecting the community if the election passed. Incorporation was approved by the voters of the community, and the city waived their jurisdiction rights. In the case of Panorama, however, the city hesitated, and asked for time to study the legal ramifications involved.

Within the state of Texas, a city the size of Conroe is permitted the use of "finger annexations" in order to have some say over the development that might take place along its perimeter. The city is allowed to extend its corporate boundaries along the public roadways in one foot wide strips, which is accompanied by extra-territorial jurisdiction rights over the properties that lie within a mile of either side of the corporate strip. When plotted on the county map, these tentacles of city limits extend along county roads, and state and federal highways in all directions, and as such, impose the city's control over many of the county's communities. These communities,
then, cannot incorporate without the city first waiving its right of extra-territorial jurisdiction, as was the case with the community in question.

From the first meeting with the city council, Panorama's request was deferred to the next month's meeting. The mayor was quoted as saying:

I would not like to see the city of Conroe get boxed in by a lot of small municipalities and cut off our growth. We wouldn't want some of the problems Houston has had with Bellaire, West University Place and others. I understand the problems of the Panorama people and I am sympathetic with them. Hopefully, we will reach an agreement mutually beneficial.27

In the February city council meeting the mayor announced that by mutual agreement with the Panorama Civic Association action on their request for incorporation would be delayed further to give the city time to gather additional data on the matter. At this same meeting the community of Porter Heights, represented by a small group of residents and an attorney, appeared before the council to ask them to waive the extra-territorial jurisdiction affecting their community so that they might incorporate. This community is in the southern part of the county some fifteen miles from the city. Their principal appeal was that they wanted to protect themselves from incorporation by Houston. The council heard the appeal, located the community on the county map, warned the residents of the responsibilities of city government, and voted unanimously to grant the request upon the condition that the exact position within the jurisdiction be defined by metes and bounds, and that the proper election be held.
In this second case, then, the city did not ask for time to study the legal ramifications, and apparently found all the data necessary in the county map. Of course, Porter Heights is almost three times the distance from the city as Panorama, so the question of growth rate would be a part of the decision to grant the request of the more distant community, and delay that of the nearer. To give either request much thought is another response of the city to the area's growth. As the mayor said to me, "Some years ago the city would not have had to worry about a growth rate that would include the community of Panorama." There is also an awareness of growth patterns. The principal population growth in the county has been in the southern part of the county, but the prime growth areas for the city may lie to the west and north of its present boundaries. The lake is northwest of the city, and there will surely be increased building activity in that direction. On the surface, then, it would appear that the city made a sound and logical decision in delaying action on one and granting the request of the other community.

On the other hand, there is the question of the larger community -- the county. There is the county government, and they are concerned with those affairs outside the city limits of its few small towns. And yet, as the county judge said, "The county's like the big toothless dog -- a lot of bark, but little bite." Until the enactment of the county health district in the last part of 1971, the county had no way of controlling development within its boundaries. The new health district does at least allow the county to enforce regulations on
those aspects of development which affect the health of county residents, such as septic tanks, water wells, and the sanitary facilities of trailer and tourist courts. In truth, however, the city possesses the real control tool which could shape a good portion of the county. The extensive use of the "finger annexations" provides the city with a control which effectively penetrates the major development areas of the county by virtue of their mutual relationship to the major roadways. Still, when faced with the question of Porter Heights sub-division, the city elected to follow the immediate concerns of the city — growth potential within a five mile radius of city hall. And too, the appeal of the community for protection from Houston was one with which the councilmen could easily empathize, just as the representative from Porter Heights said, "You people know about Houston....we only want to protect our children." So in the end, the response of the council was reflected in the comment of one of its members: "I don't see why we should hinder these people's right to protect themselves."

In the case of the community of Panorama, the city officials responded with the possibility of extending the city's boundaries, and even began to compare their situation with that of Houston, and yet, both Bellaire and West University Place have a larger population than Conroe. In the case of the Porter Heights community, the city could see only so far beyond its boundaries. Whether it was from a nostalgia for a people's right to govern themselves, or a common fear of Houston, the city council hastily granted the community its right to incorporate. There was apparently no thought of the city's extended responsibilities,
and if not responsibility, no thought of the city's potential for effecting some control over the development throughout the county. And too, there was no consideration given to the county's concern in the matter. Still, the city talks of "regional planning", and there have been cooperative efforts between city and county.

According to a newspaper article in the fall of 1971, city officials were using the term "regional planning" often in reference to the city's approach to the future. The article went on to connect the term with the sewage treatment plant, a sub-division ordinance, the sanitary landfill sites and the unresolved water problem. The only reference to what might be associated with a higher quality of life was the city's new "professionalized" police department. Cooperation between city and county has also been along these lines. For instance, they have created joint sanitary landfill sites, and more recently have appointed committees to study the possibility of pooling their taxing administrations. These are positive signs of cooperation between the two governmental bodies, and yet, it is the concept of planning that is most important. It can be the truest indicator of the sophistication of a community's planning efforts.

For the city officials of Conroe, the three major concerns have been the problems of solid waste, sewage and water. According to these same officials, they have two of the three "beat." They have enough landfill sites to serve the city's needs for the next twenty years. They are preparing to construct a sewage treatment plant which can
handle a population of two hundred thousand people. The remaining problem of water is unresolved, but they feel that Lake Conroe may be the answer. These are the kinds of problems that the city leaders associate with planning for "orderly development in Montgomery County."

When I talked with one of the city councilmen about the opportunity the city and county had for cooperative planning efforts, he agreed, but talked mostly about how the county could do so much more than they were presently doing. To him, the most apparent cooperative effort between county and city would be to join in constructing a major sewer line around the new lake to pick up the effluent from the individual developments around the lake and distribute it to the anticipated city treatment plant. Such an effort would assure the proper control of waste treatment in that crucial area, as otherwise the effluent will be discharged into the lake.

For the city then, there is no lack of action in preparing for the continued surge of growth in the area. They have planned beyond mere containment with the twenty year capacity landfill sites, and the sewage treatment plant, which is designed for a population four times the 1970 total county population. Still, these "regional planning" efforts could hardly be called innovative, nor would their concern for the pure necessities of life qualify for comprehensive planning. If concepts of planning are an indication of the leaders' sophistication in dealing with current problems and planning for the future, then they have only begun to plan for Conroe's transition from a rural to
an urban county seat.

As for the county, there is the problem referred to by numerous local newspaper editorials and by almost everyone with whom I talked. The Commissioners Court is still dominated by rural representatives. They were characterized as the ranchers, the rodeo riders, or the county road men. There is also the antiquated county system itself. For example, the county's four precincts are represented by the four commissioners who are responsible for the road and bridge work in his precinct. This responsibility is divided among them so that each has his own road crews and equipment, meaning there is no overlap among them, even in resources. Such a division of responsibilities, then, could only strengthen whatever inclination the individual commissioner might have to handle things in his own way. There is not much room for county comprehensive planning here.

But then, the county has a planning commission. In the first part of 1972, the county judge appointed the new members of the commission. Both city and county are represented. The immediate action of the commission was to assign study committees. The study topics were: transportation, sub-divisions, legal problems, mass transit, and health and sanitation. The commission is also to study the possibility of enacting sub-division and zoning regulations with the help of the Houston-Galveston Area Council.

While there is still the question of the direction of this planning
effort, they do indicate the desire to expand county responsibilities. To implement a planning policy or attempt to control development will be difficult within the restrictions of an antiquated county government. County commissioners administrate rural affairs while the county is rapidly becoming an urban community. The planning commission is left with full responsibility for directing the transition. As an integral part of their planning efforts, the commission must plan basic structural changes in the county governmental system.

The city has the strongest mechanism for planning control but assumes the least responsibility for the total community. City leadership extends its territorial concern only to protect Conroe’s growing needs. While the county must provide for a vertical expansion of their responsibilities, the city must expand their responsibilities horizontally if they expect to be a positive influence in county development. For both city and county leaders there is the task of developing a game plan sufficient for the metropolitan league.

2240 The Future of the Game in Conroe

The response of Conroe leaders indicates that their sense of community has extended beyond the city limits and now includes the entire county. The town is the county seat, so naturally county concern is reflected in the functioning of county officials, and the concern seems to be felt by city officials as well as by the other community leaders not connected directly with either government body. There are two principal reasons for this extended concern, which go
beyond the traditional association as county seat. For the city, there is the physical extension of the city's boundaries through the "finger annexations." City officials are forced to consider county-wide growth rates and patterns as they decide in which direction or how far to extend the one foot wide strips, and they are forced into making decisions over development within the extra-territorial jurisdiction or whether to waive the jurisdiction if requested by an existing community that wants to incorporate. Other community leaders are sensitized to county affairs due to the real estate development. Whether it is a direct involvement as with their own property holdings, or through the business it generates for them, these leaders pay special attention to the development that occurs within their community, the county.

While this sense of community is extended beyond the town of Conroe, it is confined to the boundaries of the county. One could imagine that regardless of the building intensity just south of the county line the community leaders would have shown little concern until the first house was built on the north side of that line. It is as if until they can exercise some political control over the development there would be no reason to be concerned. There are certainly signs of the leaders' need for exercising control, and many indications of the need for maintaining this control in local hands. The fear of Houston appears to be almost solely based upon the fear of losing this control. In that example it was perfectly clear that this fear could be easily surfaced by an encroachment across the county line.
Regardless of the sense of community being the county, the center of that community is still Conroe, and the depth of concern for most of the leaders is reduced as the distance from that center increases. As in the example of the annexation request, the city could really only be concerned for the expansion of its boundaries, and that could be reasonably projected only so far beyond its present boundaries. It is true that Conroe is still the economic and political center of the county, but the town itself is not the generator of the growth of the county. No leader denies the impact of Houston, yet his response is as though the growth is being introduced into the county through Conroe. Actually the growth is easing into the county from its southern boundaries, and will, in the near future, radiate from around the new lake. Conroe is growing, but it may very soon lose its dominance of the county to the development occurring outside the town.

If the community leaders are intent upon maintaining local control of the county, which means Conroe control, then they must extend their means of control. From the examples of the leaders' response it is apparent that they are depending upon a traditional approach to maintaining control which assumes the persistent dominance of the county seat, or that the city's own growth will keep pace with that outside its boundaries so it will remain the major county influence. If the growth were generated by the town itself, it might be possible, but the growth is metropolitan growth. It comes from the outside.

There is some talk of city-county consolidation over certain concerns,
such as in the joint sanitary landfill sites or the committee charged with the task of studying the feasibility of combining the taxing administrations. Still, there is little in the way of innovation in their planning efforts. There is planning for the future, but almost exclusively in terms of utilitarian functions. There are committees assigned to study topics which do sound promising, but the planning seems to lack any real comprehensive approach. Yet, through it all, there are conditions which make the community leaders ripe for innovation if introduced properly. There is the confidence they possess due to their awareness of the county's growth potential. As in the issue with the telephone company or the electric utility company, the city demonstrated its ability to stand by the opinion of the consultant, either on the faith of its position in the issue or bent on exploiting its advantage. If the community leaders could be convinced of the advantages in initiating some planning program which recognizes the need for comprehensive community planning, it seems that they could supply the necessary commitment.

The community leaders seem to feel a real need to promote themselves as progressive. The incentive is strong, as handling their affairs progressively is the surest way of maintaining local control. It would seem that if the leaders could be convinced that an innovative planning program were truly progressive and that it would be the surest way of dealing with their affairs in a manner of their choosing, they would be receptive to the program. There is also the other special attribute of the area's growth potential which has had the
effect of easing the likelihood of personal conflict. The growth potential is so great that the issue over the application for the savings and loan association seems like a mock battle for competition and is really more revealing in terms of the distinctions among the leaders than in the conflicts for personal economic gain. Conflicts of this nature may be largely avoided as most leaders appear to feel that there is enough growth pending to assure everyone a share in the profits.

While the leaders in Conroe are involved in the game of urbanization, and the game is scored by comparative growth statistics, they seem most concerned with how they will be judged on their performance. In effect, it is not a question of whether they win or lose (their winning is a "sure bet" the way the scoring is done), but how they play the game. The stakes are high! If their performance is not judged progressive enough for the major league, they may personally be replaced on the lineup. If they continue to perform poorly in individual skirmishes, which are part of the big league, they may lose control over the game plan, and the scoring statistics will ring especially hollow. So, the game for them is to promote themselves as top performers and to stay ahead of the game enough to exploit their position to gain every advantage which might prolong what they all seem to feel is inevitable: loss of control. The stage of the game, the way the leaders play the game, and their sensitivity to the stakes of the game, do point to a condition which offers the opportunity for a model of how a metropolitan sub-community, with a heritage of the minor
leagues, may become a vital part of the metropolitan community, or a part of the major league.
FOOTNOTES


5Ibid., p. 106.


7Ibid., pp. 70-93.


9Dean, p. 7.

10Ibid.


12Ibid.

13Ibid., p. 226.

14Ibid., p. 234.

15The Conroe Courier, Conroe, Texas, November 17, 1971.

16Ibid., November 21, 1971.

17Ibid.

18Ibid., January 27, 1972.
19Ibid., October 10, 1971.
20Ibid., October 13, 1971.
21Ibid.
22Ibid., October 17, 1971.
23Ibid.
24Ibid., December 26, 1971.
25Ibid.
26Ibid., December 29, 1971.
27Ibid., January 9, 1972.
28Ibid., October 27, 1971.
URBANIZATION AND THE SMALL TOWN CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT
The Concern for the Downtown

Conroe is favored in many ways, but it does share in some of the worries of other small towns. Almost everyone I talked to was concerned for the future of the downtown. There are several vacant stores, some even on the square, and many stores "just look bad." Everyone agreed that there is still a lot of business downtown, but there are two shopping centers already and there is bound to be more later. They pointed to the courthouse as an advantage, attracting traffic as it did, but it was also part of the parking problem that threatened to get worse. And too, the east-west artery, Highway 105, brought a lot of traffic through the downtown and that did not help the increasing problem of congestion. Since the city changed some of the streets around the square to one-way traffic, there have been many unhappy merchants. Most felt the change just aggravated the problems. There was no argument, then, that the downtown had some problems that needed attention. The president of the Downtown Merchants Association said that the association was seriously considering hiring an architect to propose solutions to some of these problems.

Cause for Assumption

If the members of the merchants association do follow through on their idea of hiring an architect, they will join the ranks of many small towns who have attempted to effect a similar situation in the central business district, or the downtown. Some of these towns have
been rewarded with genuine improvements; others have felt that they
could just as well have saved their money. I took advantage of the
concern for the downtown circumstance to pursue the merchants' at-
titudes toward the prospects of renovation. It seemed the most obvi-
ous pursuit for the discovery of attitudes which would effect physical
solutions to design problems, and it was a problem with which I had
some experience. In my interviews with the downtown merchants, I
assumed the role of a designer who might have been hired by the mer-
chants association. Of course, I had the advantage of operating
incognito; that is, to the merchants I was only a graduate student
doing research for a master thesis and not a hired consultant, but
I feel the response I received was not much different from what I
would have received as a designer under contract.

Very soon in my interviewing I began to realize that there were
assumptions that a designer would carry with him into a project
of this sort that might not necessarily be true, although essential
to his involvement. Even to attempt a design solution, the designer
would have to assume that the problems downtown would be identifiable
and that they would be solvable. Then, the designer must assume that
the merchants really want solutions. This is to say that they would
judge fairly any proposals submitted, and that they would be objective
in judging the cost involved whether the cost be in terms of money or
in terms of the changes required. This may sound naive, considering
the reality of compromise; but these assumptions would, nevertheless,
form the basis for a designer's involvement.
The assumption that the problems will be identifiable is a natural one in downtown renovation. So many problems are readily apparent. The stores are old and ill-kept, the sidewalks narrow, parking space limited, the streets narrow, and general access restricted. Unless the designer goes beyond obvious problems, however, he may miss the greatest problem. This problem lies with the merchants themselves. Regardless of the physical improvements made, advantage must be taken of them if they are to be of benefit. Providing promotional space does no good if the merchants continue to merchandise as they did before the improvements. In fact, the project itself is dependent upon the merchants' accepting the renovation proposals. If the designer feels that the success of the project is dependent upon providing promotional space, but the merchants think their biggest problem is parking, the gap may be so wide between the two approaches that no compromise would be of benefit to the downtown. It stands to reason, then, that the designer must temper his assumptions about the problem with the attitudes and perceptions of the merchants if he is to be of any real assistance to their situation.

There is also a false security in assuming that the merchants would be willing to accept the cost involved in dealing with their problems or even in assuming that they are enthusiastic for the project in the first place. Their perception of the project may not go beyond utilizing the designer's expertise in selecting the colors for the store fronts, while the designer might have visions of completely changing the merchandising techniques of the merchants. The designer may
discover, too late in the process, that the merchants' enthusiasm for the project is short-lived. Again, it would be to the designer's advantage to discover the merchants' prospects for the project, not to be bound by their suggested solutions, but to understand their concepts of the cost involved.

My approach to the interviews with the downtown Conroe merchants, was through the eyes of a designer, intent upon discovering the true problems, confident of the ability to deal with those problems once discovered, and convinced of the merchants' equal zeal for the process. It did not take very long to realize that the problems downtown were more complicated than a walk around the square would suggest. The merchants seemed to constantly contradict themselves, either over the weight of a particular problem, its cause, or over the urgency of taking corrective action. It became questionable as to whether they would be willing to commit themselves to any course of action that might require a real change in the way things had always been downtown.

If I had actually been the designer hired by the merchants association, I would have been tempted to forfeit the project at several points along the way. However, as I continued the pursuit I began to see certain patterns of response which suggested some meaning for the design process. There were particular problems that kept dominating parts of the interviews and frequently in the same context from one interview to the next. There were persistent attitudes as to the
causes of these problems, and there were reoccurring proposals for the solutions to the problems. But the patterns became clearest when I began to talk to those community leaders who weren't necessarily linked with the downtown area. Not only were their comments about the situation downtown helpful, but there was a definite relationship between their attitudes of broader community affairs and the more specific concerns of the downtown merchants. The influence of the community's growth on the merchants' attitudes toward their circumstance in some aspects was similar to its effect upon the community leaders, while in others, there was a marked contrast in the effects. Still, in every comparable aspect, the comparison helped put the downtown in a clearer perspective and actually helped in understanding the broader picture as well.

The following section, Downtown Conroe, then, is a summary of my interviews with the merchants. The material is arranged according to the dominant discussion themes; and, except for my specific observations, is presented in a manner that is, as nearly as possible, the way it was expressed to me.
Downtown Conroe is typical of many small-town county seats in the U. S. The courthouse stands in the middle of a public square surrounded by thirty-five or forty shops and stores. More flank the streets which extend from the square. The courthouse was built in the 1930's and it has since received wing additions on its north and south sides. It might best be described as a utilitarian structure, both in its severe architectural style and in the way its wings have been raised above street level to nest employee parking below. The surrounding buildings are equally unimpressive in architectural style, and most look as they must have thirty and forty years ago.

One block east of the square lie the tracks of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. They act as a definite boundary to the downtown, especially when they are heavy with rumbling diesels and trailing strings of cars. North of the square the old residential neighborhood has become a transitional area as the older homes have been razed for private parking lots, small office buildings, or an expanding church. The south edge of the downtown reflects the building surge in the opposite directions. The Santa Fe Railway's east-west route lies only three blocks south of the square and its intersection with the tracks of the Missouri Pacific has generated a modest complex of industrial type facilities. The generator of commercial and residential land uses
appears to be U. S. Highway 75, the main north-south route prior to the interstate. The newer construction, including city and county facilities, is west of the square. Here lies the county library, city hall, as well as Hotel Conroe, and the Bank of Conroe, all built in the last fifteen years. The prime generator of activity for the downtown is the courthouse. The city hall and county library serve as vital supports. Next in importance as generators are the First National Bank and the J. C. Penny Department Store. Other stores include the usual array of small-town stores from chains to locally owned drugstores, variety, furniture, clothing and department stores. One grocery store and two restaurants remain on the square. Most commercial uses are on the ground level. Many of the buildings with upper levels contain office space, primarily attorneys' offices.

Presently the principal commercial competition to the downtown lies with two shopping centers. North Hills is two miles northwest on Route 75. Conroe Shopping Center is but a few blocks from the square, across Route 75. Neither is more than five years old, nor has either been fully developed. They have, however, begun to drain the downtown not only of its retail trade, but of its facilities as well. In August 1971, one of its largest department stores left the square to occupy space in one of the shopping centers.

3220 **The Problem of Parking**

The past and present downtown merchants I interviewed all agree that parking is their biggest problem. First, they feel there is not
enough of it. The problem was aggravated by the city's changing
three out of the four streets which define the square to one-way
traffic flow. The effects of this change were not anticipated by
the majority of the merchants, or at least only a couple protested
the city's action. The traffic change introduced parallel parking
to the square along Highway 105. Everyone agreed the change aggra-
vated the problem as women customers in particular are reluctant
to attempt to parallel park.

Another parking complaint was centered around the concern that many
of the customer parking spaces were being taken by the stores' em-
ployees or the tenants of the office spaces. Nearly everyone pointed
their finger at the employers who refused to restrict their own em-
ployees from parking right in front of their store. When those guilty
of this offense had been confronted with the problem, they had answered
that they were afraid to demand that their employees stop the prac-
tice as, "they might quit and help was awfully hard to come by."
The offenders from the office spaces, mostly attorneys, had previously
been immune to parking regulations due to their influence at city
hall. Such immunity ceased with the election of the new mayor and
the installation of the new police chief. The merchants feel the
purpose of the parking meters is not only to provide the city with
additional revenue, but to act as an incentive to parking turn-over.
This latter aspect has not been too successful in discouraging employee
parking on the square. Each meter is of a two-hour capacity. One
nickel is required for each hour. The employee's day is divided into
two hour segments. Between arrival, coffee breaks, lunch and departure time, he can easily feed the meter. But then if he should somehow miss feeding the meter, the fine is only twenty-five cents. Until recently the meters were not strictly patrolled, and the violator might even avoid a ticket. Now the city has two meter maids who are much better at enforcing the regulation and will ticket the violator more than once if he persists in holding the space. One merchant felt the meters would be more successful if it were not for the fact that they could be operated for only a penny. One penny buys twelve minutes of parking time. Some women will park in front of his store and deposit only a penny intending to make a quick purchase and be on their way. "Well, it takes them at least ten minutes to pick out that shirt and then they decide they'll get a matching tie to go with it. When they return to the car they have a ticket," and he probably has lost a customer. Still, most of those I talked with feel stricter enforcement is necessary. One said that was really the only way. After all, he himself just could not seem to stop taking up his best customer parking space.

An attorney has recently built a small office building less than two blocks north of the square. He told me that he made sure that the structure was positioned on the site so that it could be seen from the courthouse. While people might walk blocks in a shopping center "they would not walk anywhere that they could not see from their starting point in a small town." Most merchants believed this is true in Conroe and that it is an important feature of the parking
problem. As I was told, this is true for the employees as well as the customers.

Many of the downtown merchants felt it was essential that there be supplemental parking provided. Some may have felt that the city should provide this extra parking, but most suggested solutions which would be beyond the city's capacity. One suggested purchasing surrounding sites for parking lots and then providing transportation to the square via a shuttle bus or small rubber-tired train. Two others felt that the downtown merchants should incorporate and raise the necessary funds to buy a site on which to construct a multi-level parking structure which could handle from one thousand to fifteen hundred cars. One felt sure that they could get the cooperation of the First Baptist Church just north of the square, as many of them were deacons of the church. The church property would be an ideal location to serve the needs of downtown on weekdays as well as to provide additional parking for the church on Sundays.

In 1968 a Houston engineering and planning firm submitted to the city the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Conroe. The present traffic flow and parking arrangements around the square were part of this planning document. It is only now, however, that there is nearly unanimous agreement that these changes have actually hindered rather than helped the situation. There were a few who protested the changes before city council, but the great majority said nothing until now. But then, maybe they recognized that the problems of traffic flow are
not always so easily solved without sacrificing some of the parking convenience. The automobile must first be able to get downtown before it can claim an available parking space. Maybe those who kept silent were not even aware of the four year old planning recommendations. For whatever reasons, the downtown merchants failed to represent themselves as a collective body either in favor of or opposed to the city's proposal, but rather by submission, elected to support the city's action.

Now that nearly all agree to the detrimental effects of the changes, they are suggesting collective action to counter these effects. The question, then, is: will they now unify their efforts when they have not in the past? Can they agree on the necessary actions? Would they be able to agree on the location of supplemental parking sites? If they decide to build a single parking structure, how will they agree as to which side of the square should be favored by its location? And, of course, will they be willing to commit themselves for the necessary funds for whatever action they pursue?

Some years ago employees might have parked on the square without raising the ire of neighboring merchants. Now that the parking situation appears critical, the act was pointed to by almost everyone as a major offence. Similarly, the salary paid to these employees several years ago does not bind many of them to the downtown today. The merchants claim they cannot afford to pay the higher salaries of those dealing in high sales volume. As illustrated by the store
owner who parked in his customers' prime parking space, it has been a traditional privilege of those downtown to be able to park in front of their work place.

The reference to the city's preferential treatment of those attorneys who persisted in taking up retail customer parking is an expected response. It reflects the increasing competition between retail and office uses for the few parking spaces available. Some of the downtown's representatives are acutely aware of this aspect of the parking problem. One mentioned that the county government is increasing its staff and thus demanding not only more office space but more employee and visitor parking space. The downtown struggle to maintain retail supremacy in the city may evolve into an internal conflict between those forces representative of office and those of retail uses.

3230 Building Ownership and Management

Many of the downtown merchants own only their business, not the property or the building. If one decides the building is in need of improvements then he must convince the owner. According to those with whom I talked, this can be a formidable problem. One barber was said to have asked his landlord to fix a leaking roof only to be told to get a bucket. The reason for such an attitude was explained to me in a variety of ways. First there is the absentee owner who has no real interest in Conroe, but only in the income he receives from his property. There are the owners who are millionaires or those represented by estates who cannot be bothered by the piddling affairs
of their tenants. They may not even be interested in the income the property produces. One attorney suggested that they are probably using the property as a tax write-off, either in the form of depreciation or as a loss. Others felt that most of the buildings are so old that there is no depreciation remaining. One man told me he had actually tried to buy some of the buildings downtown, but that he was always refused and not necessarily due to his offer. The profit they would have realized apparently would not have outweighed some other advantage. Another type of ownership referred to was the one which had been handed down from either one or two preceding generations. Not only is the problem of absentee ownership involved in this type, but the ownership is sometimes divided among several persons scattered all over the country. A unanimous decision necessary for property improvement or sale might take months to transact.

There aren't that many stores which are actually vacant around the square, but there are some which might appear that way at first glance. The improvements which have been made on some of the stores have been restricted to the street level, and one sometimes sees a thirty year difference in architectural styles between first and second floors. I was told that if an owner pays for any improvements to his building, he is most likely to restrict it from street level to awning height. One druggist wasn't even allowed to paint the brick above his awning. In most cases, if a merchant wanted to upgrade his facilities he has paid for it himself. There are, however, incentives for electing this route. Those who have paid for their own improvements feel that they
have "come out all right in the deal." Many have obtained a new contract with the owner in the form of a new ten-year lease at the same rental rate, plus an option for an additional ten-year lease at that same rate. One who had consummated such a deal said he would prefer such an arrangement to a hypothetical rent increase of fifty per cent. He stuck with this preference even when shown that it would take more than twelve years at the increased rental rate to equal his personal investment.

The low rent structure in the downtown holds many of the tenants who would otherwise move to the shopping center to escape the increasing problems of the area. Almost everyone confirmed that their rent represents only about two to two and a half per cent of their total retail sales volume. A shopping center location, on the other hand, would demand around five per cent of the sales volume. At this rate, a storekeeper with an annual sales volume of $100,000 may be paying a monthly rent of less than $200. If, on the other hand, he could only produce this same volume at a shopping center location, his rent might run more than $400 per month. Consequently, not one merchant who owns his own business talked of leaving his downtown location for a spot in one of the shopping centers. Several talked of the possibility of a second store, but each felt his downtown business would warrant his holding on to his position on the square for some time to come.

The attitudes of the merchants toward their tenancy lean toward two
extremes. At one end there is despondency toward a situation which seems hopeless. How can they hope to renovate their stores with such negative response from their landlords? At the other end there is the satisfaction of knowing how much better their rent structure is than that of the shopping center. Somewhere in between lies the compromise. The compromises thus far have been made through an extended lease for the landlord and a guaranteed rent ceiling for the tenant. For the landlord the compromise represents a continued dependency upon the tenant for building upkeep and a continued isolation from the affairs of the downtown. The lease agreement plus the tenant's investment in the improvements binds him to the downtown for better or for worse. For the downtown, then, these compromises have meant improvements to building facades, even if only up to awning height. The most important question that comes to mind, however, is what will these extended commitments mean to the future of the downtown? Will these merchants be the sole supporters of efforts to bolster a faltering downtown market?

There is another group of merchants who have a major commitment to the future of the downtown. A few of those who own their business also own the building. But this commitment has not necessarily meant a visible difference between their buildings and those owned by the absentee owners. There seems to be no incentive to equal that of the extended lease and guaranteed rent ceiling. Those who have made improvements are said to have been forced into it by competition, typically from outside the downtown. It is also the general opinion
of the other merchants that those who own their buildings but refuse to make improvements are the old people. Many have no children, and therefore see no future for their business beyond their own lifetime. Others are said to continue operation only for the sake of their longtime employees. These merchants are most often pointed out as creating the problem in downtown renovation.

A third group of merchants, who are considered the gypsies of the downtown, are those who represent the chain stores. Their commitment is to a larger market than that of the downtown. They were among the first to leave for the shopping centers, looking for larger and larger sales volumes. But in spite of their stigma as the outsiders, the independent merchants must concede that their stores on the whole, are the most attractive and serve as major generators of shopping traffic. If these stores abandon the square, what will happen to its viability? Last August one of the major department stores left for the shopping center. Other chain stores are said to be "itching" to do the same.

These three types of occupants of the downtown buildings represent a composite of attitudes which shape the life of the square. More important to the economic future of the area, however, may be the attitudes which they have toward each other. They all are aware that in attempting to solve any of their mutual problems, they must cooperate with each other. But few talked of his contribution to the problems of the downtown, but rather those of the others. In the case of
property ownership and management, a myriad of other people and reasons are pointed out as the causes of their problems and as many excuses given as to why they are so difficult to solve. While each will agree that the effort toward cooperative action demands initiative, there is a persistent "let George do it" attitude. Actually, the situation downtown has not reached a critical stage either in the problem of traffic and parking, or in its sales volume. The shopping centers have yet to rob the downtown of an expanding consumer market.

3240 A Changing Market

Prior to the extension of Interstate Highway 45 from Houston to Conroe, the downtown was the dominant retail trade area for southern Montgomery County. In that recent past, a trip to Houston could easily take an hour and a half. The trip was cut in half when the interstate route became available in 1963. Nearer to the shopper than Houston was Houston's Northline Shopping Center. While one Conroe resident saw it as only twenty minutes down the road, it is closer to a thirty or thirty-five minute drive. But it must have seemed awfully close to the downtown merchant who saw the first signs of his market supremacy crumbling. As one witness put it, "Why continue to shop downtown in old, ugly stores, and pay their higher prices, when the new stores, and the better and cheaper merchandise of the shopping center are but a short drive south?"

The interstate also made the woodlands of Montgomery County available
to the Houston commuter. A forty-five minute drive meant little to the increasing surge of executives who were being relocated by the southern drift of many large northeastern corporations. The freedom and comfort of making the trip to work in his own car was a delight as compared to travel times of an hour or hour and a half via public transit. The resulting phenomenal building surge to the northwest quadrant of the Houston metropolitan area has brought a new market into the county. But where there is a new market, new facilities spring up to cater to that market. Conroe now has two shopping centers and numerous "strip" type retail facilities. The effects of this new market and competition upon the downtown have been felt in a number of ways.

All the merchants with whom I talked spoke of the changes they had seen in their own market. At one time they could recognize most of their customers as they walked in the door, or recall the faces of the charge customers as they mailed out the monthly bills. Now, however, there are many "strangers" who come in their stores to make a purchase. Their charge books are filled with new names and addresses. While much of their older market may have been diverted to the nearer competitors, the majority of the merchants on the square felt they were participating substantially in the new market. One druggist operated a radio-directed delivery service and said he made many deliveries to new surrounding sub-divisions. Another sold the girls gym suits for the school district and as a consequence had pulled in many of the suburbanites. A jeweler said that for the last five years or so,
his sales volume had increased an average of fifteen per cent every year. But if this participation in the new market represents new sales volume for most all merchants on the square, it also represents a threat to most of them. This threat comes in both the changes necessary to attract and hold on to this new market and in the competitors the new market has attracted.

One market which has lost its significance to the downtown has been the local residents who used to walk to the square to purchase most of their commodities. As is typical of most towns in America, many of these families have moved away from the downtown. Those remaining are the older people who still depend on the downtown, but whose shopping trips are less frequent and whose purchases contribute a smaller and smaller percentage to the total sales volume. As I was told, "Some of the old ladies may come in to buy a pair of hose every week or so, but that is about all." Another market which has been characteristic of the downtown trade has been that of the town's Negro community. Several merchants pointed to the square's grocery as one store which depends heavily upon the black trade. As it is one of the few food stores extending credit purchases to its customers, it still attracts many of that "large number on welfare."

It is this kind of personalized service which many of the merchants referred to as representing the town's traditional attraction. The square's oldest dealer in men's clothing said that about twenty-five per cent of his total volume used to be composed of sales made to
Houstonians who would drive up to get the personal attention and fast tailoring service that he could provide. One of the furniture dealers mentioned that it is hard for him to compete with Houston's prices on appliances as in Conroe he is expected to service those items sold. In Houston there are many manufacturer's service centers to handle such service. Even the bank on the square has made a tradition out of offering very personalized service. In addition to a receptionist who greets those entering the bank, there is a coffee bar in the middle of the lobby to serve customer and employee alike.

Everyone with whom I talked, felt the merchandise they are handling is of the highest quality. One store manager suggested that the goods sold downtown are of a higher quality than could be found in the shopping centers. A furniture dealer felt he has an exclusive on some of the top quality brand name merchandise. He thought the principal difference between his merchandise and that of other "quality goods stores" is in the styles he carried. He carried no contemporary pieces. In a small town like Conroe, he felt that the dealer is wise to buy styles which were a couple of years behind those of the larger cities. Some feel, however, that the quality of the goods is not as important as the way it is displayed. As one observer put it, "...his merchandise is good quality, but he displays it the same way he's been doing it for thirty years."

At one time, display may not have been so important. One businessman who had been on the square for twenty years claimed that he was
welcomed as a new competitor when he began business there, but that he had failed to lure any of his competitors' habitual customers in the entire twenty years. If this was true of the customers, it is also expected by some of the merchants. More than one complained of those who had deserted them for the shopping centers and worse yet, for Houston.

The move to a shopping center last fall of one of the downtown's department stores represents the most dramatic kind of response to the changing market. Though less dramatic, a furniture dealer's decision to rearrange his floor display connotes to him a significant step toward new marketing techniques. If the "supermarketing" techniques of the furniture stores in Houston and other large cities are successful, then they might just work in Conroe. One of the chain store managers told me that the owners had decided to narrow down their market range and aim for a more select but higher grade market. According to the manager, the store has lost many of its older customers already, as they have gradually shifted the quality of their merchandise, but that it was too early to tell if the new market would make up the loss. The druggist's radio-dispatched deliveries and the renovations in the men's shop or in the jewelry stores, are a response to the market changes. All these examples are individual efforts. The question is whether the gradual, piece by piece reactions are sufficient response to continue to attract and maintain a dependable downtown market against mounting obstacles.
Conroe's downtown trade is continuing to grow. Merchants have little incentive to be innovative in their display or other marketing techniques, when they are presently doing all right. On the other hand, everybody I talked to felt that there were current problems or some on the horizon which require attention. The problems of the present were most often seen as the problems of others, which could lead to problems of the future for everyone. Not one merchant really felt he is in any immediate economic danger. Most seemed to be convinced that there will be a dependable market for some time to come. Those convinced of the necessity for change were more concerned for an unrealized market potential, or for their neighboring storekeepers who failed to see the potential and who possibly could ruin the whole thing.

A merchant's concern for the necessity of change was not always directly related to his commitment to the downtown. Several talked of opening stores in the shopping centers or in some of the "strip" developments. These were always spoken of as second stores, however, and at least one has already made this move. One chain store manager was strongly in favor of some downtown collective action which could solve some of its problems, but was equally convinced that his store should be in the shopping center. One store owner had seriously considered opening a second store, but had decided against it for fear he would be accused of trying to corner the market (an ethic I'm not so sure his fellow merchants would share).
For those intent upon action to bring about the desired change, there is the task of working within the traditions of the old market and the uncertainties of the new. Dependency upon adjoining neighborhoods, pedestrian traffic and those desiring personalized service is questionable, particularly through the use of outdated marketing. Nor can the downtown depend upon the allegiance of the local market. If people can't be depended upon to come downtown out of habit or obligation, then they must be told of those quality goods and specialized services available to them there. And that means advertising, promotion or whatever gets the message across and brings the people downtown.

The Downtown Merchants Association

In November 1971, Conroe merchants formed the Downtown Merchants Association. At its creation, committees were assigned to study various advertising and promotional proposals, downtown parking and certain other matters pertinent to the coming Christmas season. In the late 1960's another such association had existed. It was instigated by the local newspaper and was known as the United Merchants of Conroe. The essential differences between the two associations was that UMOC was promoted by the newspaper and the DMA by the merchants and that the DMA membership is restricted to those merchants who operate business within an area defined as the downtown and UMOC was only limited to the city limits.

There was the unanimous opinion, among those merchants that I interviewed,
that UMOC was "a means of the newspaper to get more advertising." And the inclusion of all those businesses outside the downtown had resulted in an emphasis on those interests rather than those of the downtown. The final issue, which led to the collapse of the association, was over the Christmas lights purchased by the members. That year, "those lights were scattered all over that county." The downtown merchants wanted no more of UMOC.

The creation of UMOC followed shortly after the opening of the interstate. According to the editor of the newspaper at the time, the threat of the shopping centers, made accessible by the new interstate, was sufficient to cause the merchants to join with the paper and form the association. During the existence of the organization, the two shopping centers in town were developed and its tenants were eligible for membership. Eventually the membership of UMOC had grown to some sixty members, but only twenty of those were from the downtown. As many of the downtown merchants told me, they have always been reluctant to do a great deal of advertising, and the great bulk of the paper's advertising was from those outside the downtown. According to the newspaper's editor, UMOC itself never paid for any of the advertising promoting the association. From both the editor and several of the merchants downtown, I was told that the promotional stunt of a staged "shoot-out" on "Go Texas Day," performed on the courthouse lawn, was received with only complaints from most of the downtown merchants. There were disagreements about how late the stores should stay open during the Christmas season, and who should pay for
the lights purchased to encourage nighttime shopping. The whole story of UMOC sounded like a composite of disagreements, misunderstandings and a lack of cooperation. It was a general consensus of those who were members and those who had only observed its operation that it had been a failure.

Now, again, the downtown merchants have formed an association. This time, however, the association is a creation of the merchants themselves. And this time, the outsiders are excluded from its membership. As one member put it, "Why should I care what happens in the shopping centers?" There was at least one merchant who had not been a part of the first effort, but who had decided to give it a try this time around. Most merchants feel that things could be much better this time. There has been a major commitment to the downtown on the part of the bank on the square.

Just across the street from its present location, the bank is constructing a new building for its own expanding facilities, plus eighteen thousand square feet of office rental space. The building is not on the square, but tangent to one of its corners. It makes an impressive cornerstone for the downtown. Not only is it the newest building downtown, but also the tallest and largest.

The new bank not only represents a two million dollar commitment to the downtown, but also represents an attitude about its relationship to the community. Just as the bank is seen as the community's
financial resource, the downtown's image has persisted as the community's resource of commercial goods. I was told by one of the community's leaders that Conroe is the only town in the county that had any significant financial resources. While he was referring to the town as a whole, the downtown is still considered the economic heart of the county. This persistent image was so strong that there was no market surveys conducted on the demand for downtown office space until the building was under construction.

I had been told, prior to my talk with the bank's president, that the bank had always been a "downtown" bank and that its officials intended for it to stay that way. When I did talk to him, and suggested that the bank could have possibly generated a shopping center of its own at another location, he said that it would be hard to find a location where you could be so sure of a market as large and stable as that of the downtown, at least for some time to come. When I suggested that the bank might have fared better at a site adjacent to the interstate, he replied, "....it didn't seem right for a local bank to be located on the interstate....those people are just passing through."

As he explained to me, his decision to remain downtown was based on the conviction that the downtown represented the largest "shopping center" in the area, and that the construction of the new bank there would assure this supremacy for some time. He felt the new building would have lived out its usefulness to the bank after a twenty-year
period, and that the downtown should continue its dominance of Conroe's retail trade for this length of time.

I was told by others that it took "some talking" on the part of the bank president to convince his board of directors of the wisdom of such a move. According to the president, their hesitancy was primarily due to the concern for the increasing traffic and parking problem. He felt they had gone a long way toward easing this problem for the bank. They were providing some sixty parking places underneath the building, for customer convenience. In addition the bank has purchased the entire block north of the new site on which they plan to provide many more parking spaces for tenants and employees.

Eventually, after the bank was under construction, the officials did have a survey conducted to determine the demand for the kind of office space they were providing in the new building. The results according to the architect and bank officials more than justified the amount of square footage the building contained. At the time I was interviewing the bank officials, some fifty-five per cent of the available space had been leased, which was considerably ahead of schedule.

To the merchants on the square, the bank represents two plus factors for the future of the downtown. First, it is expected to generate more trade activity for them as the bank's operations continue to expand. Second, the bank has "promised" to put one of its men to work on the problems of the downtown just as soon as they have com-
pleted the move to the new building. This second factor was spoken of not only as a plus for the downtown, but as the hope of the downtown. When I suggested certain actions which the Downtown Merchants Association might begin as an aid to identifying the most crucial problems, I was countered with "who has the time?" or "who's going to pay for it?". The answer eventually surfaced: the bank would deal with it soon enough.

The bank has always been a family bank, and as such has always been run with a paternalistic, strong hand. Its president, the son-in-law of the bank's founder and long-time president, has been with the bank for nearly forty years and has served as its president since 1957. He was named by almost everyone I interviewed as one of the most influential men in the community. In the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce's annual banquet, he was named as Montgomery County's Outstanding Citizen for 1971. If what the Downtown Merchants Association needs is strong leadership, then it need look no further.

The strong leadership for the defunct UMOC was the newspaper. Disenchantment with the direction of this leadership led to the collapse of the group. Again, with the DMA, there is a dependency upon a strong leadership, this time the bank. Still the bank is also a community-wide influence, and its president is a community leader, which necessitates a concern which extends beyond the downtown. Will the downtown merchants want to limit that concern? The new bank will also be a major generator of automobile traffic in the
downtown area. Will it eventually be accused of being a prime contributor to the downtown's traffic problems? As I was told by the bank's president, all the new building's tenants are from existing downtown office space. If the spaces they vacate remain unrented, will the bank be accused of adding to the problems of office rental in the downtown? The reliance on a single source of leadership could, again, lead to the failure of another merchants association.

Regardless of the strength of its leadership, or the willingness of its members to follow that leadership, the success of the DMA is still dependent upon cooperation among its members. Their attitudes of independence might preclude any mutual efforts on behalf of the association. All the merchants felt the courthouse was a prime generator for the downtown, and that the close proximity of the county library and the municipal building provided a significant pair of secondary generators. There was little discussion, however, of how each depended on the other's generation. There were complaints of how the "other" merchants would not advertise, but depended upon the advertising of his neighbor to bring the people downtown. One merchant did say that before its move to the shopping center, the department store had generated a lot of business for him, but that store was no longer on the square. On the whole, most of the merchants seemed to feel that their business was a drawing card of its own. One felt it would not hurt his business if the other stores failed to attract their customers -- people came directly to him to buy his merchandise. Another was sure his and one other friend's business on
the square could "make it fine" without the other stores. This last merchant was expected, by most of the others, to be a positive influence on their future cooperative efforts.

3260 The Implications for the Planning Process

From the summary of my interviews with the downtown merchants there are several discoveries which illustrate the weakness of approaching a design project involving a number of people with only certain assumptions as inspiration. Even the most basic assumptions, such as assuming that the problems are identifiable and solvable, or that those involved are desirous of solutions to their problems, become questionable when the project is pursued with an eye for causes rather than symptoms. The downtown, even though small in size and with so many obvious problems, is still a complex of people involved in trade within a framework of physical and mental constraints. The complex has its own immediate causes for its condition, but on the other hand, the major cause for the condition is from outside its physical realm. Still, the designer is asked to propose solutions to the problems of the downtown, problems which may be recognizable only as symptoms and treatable only as such.

The true service the designer could offer the merchants would be to help them understand the condition of the downtown in terms of its causes, to derive alternative planning treatments, and to speculate on the possible results of the pursuit of any of the alternatives. Understanding the condition of the downtown entails exploration into
both the external and internal causes. The alternatives are based upon solutions which treat the symptoms of the outside causes and those which attempt to eliminate the internal causes. Speculation on the results of any alternative is founded on the "expert" opinion of the designer, and the introspection of the merchants. The designer, as an objective professional, gives his opinion of the consequences of each alternative based upon his accumulated data of the circumstance. The merchants examine the alternatives in light of their collective aspirations for the future of the downtown, and the commitment necessary to fulfill these aspirations.

As the designer attempts to resolve problems of internal causes or ease those of external causes, he could easily discover some design aids from the merchants' attitudes as I will demonstrate with the material discussed in the previous sections. The examples are intended only as demonstrations of how the merchants' attitudes may be incorporated into the design process. There is no attempt to make comprehensive proposals for the renovation of the downtown. My emphasis is on how my discoveries of the merchants' attitudes might have specific implications for such a design project.

The over-all parking problem is essentially a symptom of an outside cause. Adaptations made to accommodate the automobile can only relieve the symptoms. Still, the symptom is the primary problem to the merchants. There are many clues about the kind of adaptations the merchants would readily accept, such as the preference of parking arrange-
ments, the feeling that visual links between parking and stores are essential, and the desire for parking turn-over, but there are other significant discoveries evident from the attitudes on the parking problem. There are the attitudes toward the office tenants and the employee-employer relationships which have become a sore spot for many of the merchants. The obvious problem of parking also led to some more subtle ones, such as the question of commitment. While all the merchants felt that parking was the primary problem, the problem was always referred to as being someone else's. It was easy enough to point to the stores that were having a severe parking problem, but there was a reluctance to admit that the problem existed for the merchant being interviewed. This was either an indication of an exaggeration of the problem itself, or the tendency of the merchants to question the significance of the problem when weighed against their sales receipts. Business is so good that for the individual merchant lack of incentive for change may be a hindrance to efforts to effect a renovation plan.

The consistent emphasis upon the parking problem does offer a clue to the designer for his approach to the presentation of his proposals. Regardless of his treatment of the traffic flow around the square, he would do well to present his recommendations with his own special emphasis upon the improvement in the parking situation. The reception of the remaining recommendations may well depend upon the merchants' response to this one problem.

The merchants' attitudes on the property ownership and management
might provide a guide for speculating on their commitment to the downtown in terms of time. There was a broad range of time commitments referred to, either due to a lease, ownership, conviction or dissatisfaction. One observer felt that Penney's would only be downtown for another five years. Other chain stores were thought to be in a similar category. These stores would represent the lowest level of commitment in terms of time. At the upper level of commitment would be the bank, with at least a twenty year useful life given to its new building. In between, would be those local merchants who hold a ten year lease on their buildings with an option for another ten. Also at this level would be those who own their own buildings, and those who are convinced the town's trade is good for a number of years yet. From this range of commitments, the designer could develop a phasing of planning action extending over the full twenty year period. This phasing would provide for changes in planning emphasis or direction, changes in the length of the remaining phases, or the abandonment of the whole process. The length of each phase would be geared to a period of time which would be consistent with the merchants' expectations and consequently their willingness to participate in the process.

The lowest level of commitment would only justify a first phase of five years. If there is the possibility, as I was told, of losing some of the chain stores, the duration of the first phase would allow these stores to participate fully in the first phase without having to commit themselves beyond that point until they were satisfied
with the effectiveness of the program. The remaining planning period could initially be divided into five year increments which would correspond to the other levels of commitment.

The time span of the various phases could also be used to estimate the individual merchant's economic commitment to building renovation. If the cost of renovations is weighed against the time necessary to regain the investment, the first phase of five years, for example, could be said to represent a payback period. What then would be an acceptable investment, to the merchant, that could be regained over a five year period? The difference in the rent structure downtown and that of the shopping centers offers a way to speculate on this investment. The merchant who elects to stay downtown rather than move to the centers is saving himself at least as much as he pays for his rent now, with his present rent only half the amount it would be in new centers. Assuming that in staying downtown, the merchant can maintain an annual sales volume of $100,000, and that his annual rent never exceeds two and a half per cent of this volume, or half the rent of the shopping centers, then the difference of $2500 per year could justify a $12,500 improvement cost over the five year period.

This kind of investment, however, would mean the merchant would be investing a sum, over the five year period, that would be the equivalent to rent paid for a shopping center location without all the amenities that go with it. According to my interviews, a fifty per cent increase in the rent to gain owner-paid-for improvements was
questionable to some. With the introduction of this qualifying factor to the estimate, the $12,500 figure might more accurately be $6250.

While this figure might not hold true for any specific merchant, it could serve the designer as an indicator of what kind of improvements might be involved with each of the different scales of business operation, according to their individual sales volume. More significantly, the process could be used to urge the reluctant merchant to exploit his advantage over the shopping center tenant, and thus gain his participation in the program.

Although this process could provide a way of estimating the commitment of the merchants in respect to both time and money, there is still the dilemma of the absentee or unconcerned building owner. Some merchants have discovered a way of dealing with the owners' negative attitude and have managed to get improvements, and their solution could indicate to the designer how the problem could be solved for all. Those who were refused improvements on the part of the building's owner, made their own, but only after obtaining a ten year lease and an option for ten more years, at the same rent rate they had prior to the improvements. The owners' apparent concern for only keeping the building occupied allows the tenant to not only get the building renovated, but also to assure the big rental advantage over the shopping centers for some time to come. As I have illustrated already, this advantage alone can pay for the improvements over the lease period.
There is also the possibility of getting the owner to pay for improvements by the tenant’s acceptance of a rent increase. If the tenant would accept a fifty per cent increase in his rent, the increase could repay the owner for the improvements of a first phase by the end of the phase. To the tenant who pays $200 per month rent, a fifty per cent increase in rent would be $100 per month or $1200 per year. Over a five year period, this would mean $6000 contributed to improvements, but then he would reap the benefits of those improvements without paying any interest on a business improvement loan, or without tying up that sum of money for that period.

Just as the concept of promotion is a part of marketing, promotion will play an essential role in the designer’s efforts to bring about changes in the downtown which will affect their present marketing techniques. As I discovered, a merchant’s concern for the necessity of change was not always related to his commitment to the downtown. The one talking of change may also be the one who appears to be on the verge of leaving the downtown. It would be necessary first, to convince these merchants of how the recommended changes would so affect the downtown that they could be assured of the wisdom of committing themselves to the downtown for at least the first phase. Then these merchants could be enlisted to help convince the others of the necessity for change.

All of the merchants appeared to rely upon some traditional image of the downtown as the major retail center of the area to attract a certain
number of customers. As an initial step toward gaining a cooperative effort from the merchants, the designer could work with the group to construct a collective image of market elements they feel best represent the downtown. Almost all talked of a personalized service and a high quality of goods as being characteristic of the downtown trade. The collective image would be composed of these kinds of remarks from all the merchants on and around the square. In its final form, it would be presented to the representative body for evaluation of its worth as a goal determinate. These merchants could decide if the project goal, in terms of its marketing techniques, would be to reinforce this image, in light of the other project goals, or to pursue a new market image for the downtown.

From the marketing attitudes, certain aspects of either market image pursuit can be highlighted. First, if the direction decided upon is to reinforce the personalized service image of the downtown, then promotion will be necessary. As I repeatedly heard, most merchants have a reluctance to advertise. Without advertising, it might be hard to convince those comprising the area's new market that this one reason is sufficient for shopping downtown. Most likely these people feel that those merchants who were intent upon offering the best customer service, moved to the shopping centers, or else those in the centers represent the modern progressive merchant who realizes the importance of customer service. In spite of their apparent awareness of the changing market, the majority of the downtown merchants continue to market their goods as though everyone should appreciate this
quality of service downtown and make a point of taking advantage of it. It would be essential to the success of the project, that the designer convince those hesitant merchants of the importance of promotion in reinforcing the desired downtown image of service.

Another feature of the downtown market image apparent from the merchants' attitudes, was the belief that the merchandise downtown was of the highest quality, and as suggested, superior to that of the shopping centers. If the merchants are determined that this be a feature of the desired image, then promotion will be necessary to inform those comprising the new market. Unless those stores in the shopping centers bear the label of "discount store" then their comparative newness implies the latest merchandise, and through their display techniques, the highest quality. Even more importantly, the new market is more familiar with the names of chain stores in the centers than with those local stores on the square. But just as these people associate store names with shopping habits, they purchase merchandise by brand name. If the downtown stores offer quality goods with brand name labels then they must let the new market know.

If the merchants should agree that the desired image is incompatible with that necessary to attract the new market, but decide they prefer to continue their customary marketing techniques, then they could be made aware of the consequences by a closer look at their own definition of the changing market. All the merchants talked of how their market composition had changed in the past years. The older people had either
died or moved away or else only made minor purchases. The number of patrons from Houston who used to drive up for specialized service had been declining. Yet, many merchants had experienced increases in sales volume. Parallel to this better business, however, there had been marketing changes downtown. The druggist had chosen to serve the suburban customer by introducing radio-directed delivery service. The jeweler had renovated his store and used radio advertising frequently. And the grocer had increased the amount of newspaper advertising. So it could easily be argued that the downtown has not benefited solely by continuing to merchandise as always, nor has the increase in sales been due to a growing traditional market, but rather to a changing market— a new market.

Those merchants who felt the strongest need for change downtown were those who left for the shopping centers in order to attract the new market. Those remaining who feel a change is necessary are those who talked of the possibility of opening a second store outside the square. Just as the second store signifies the pursuit of the new market, the changes they advocate reflect this pursuit. Consequently, if no real marketing changes are made downtown, these merchants will remain dissatisfied with the status quo, and this discontent could hasten their venture into a second store. When they have made this move their interest in the downtown location will most likely yield to those of the new location. If these stores are finally vacated, then any attraction to the new market would be lost if the remaining merchants continue to show no interest. The vacant store left unattended would attract no
new tenant and the downtown's image of decline would be assured.
THE NEED TO LISTEN IN CONROE
In dealing with the response of small town leadership to change, there is an expectation that their response will differ, from that of the leaders of larger urban places. Ruralism or provincialism are common associations with the people of small towns. Design professionals come to expect certain kinds of response from small town people as they are engaged for services within their community. The present response in Conroe cannot be so easily classified as rural, unless rural is used to imply a level of concern of the individual leader or a concern that is associated with the scale of involvement. There are certain leaders who appear to be more aware of their broadening responsibilities than others, possibly due to their age, education, or business or professional concerns, but most apparent from this study is the relation between the level of concern and scale. The difference between the concerns of the merchants and the community leaders is the clearest illustration of this relation.

If the leaders' community of concern is the county, then the merchants' community is the downtown. As such, the merchants appear more provincial than the community leaders. If there is a fear of loss of control with the merchants, it is over losing their economic advantage to the shopping center, not of losing political control to Houston. To the merchant, the growth potential of the county is a threat to the past economic dominance of the downtown regardless of the immediate advantages they realize. As with the community leaders, there is a
distinction among the merchants as to how they respond to this threat. Those not so bound to the downtown community, such as the managers of the chain stores, move or plan to move to the shopping centers. Like some of the community leaders' reaction to the new town, they see the prospects of growth as opportunity, and the threat only to those who resist the inevitable.

While the community leader is able to freely respond to the changes brought about by growth, the merchant must work within the constraints or else abandon the downtown community. Planning downtown is handicapped by the aspect of causes and symptoms. So many problem causes are beyond the community, while so many symptoms are begging for attention. It is tempting to deal only with the containment of problems and oversimplify these in order to take some action. Planning for the community leaders seems bound to community as well. County boundaries begin and terminate their planning efforts. Though the growth is introduced from without that community, they attempt to deal with it from within.

With such a comparison, it is possible to separate the community leaders from the downtown merchants in much the same manner as the community leaders might be separated from the leadership in Houston. The one appears provincial when compared with the other. But, then, Houston may look provincial in its concern when a statewide growth policy is considered. Houston appears to be concerned only for its growth potential and not for that of San Antonio or Waco. There is
just as much concern for local control over its affairs when faced with state or federal involvement. Still, it is less provincial than Conroe if not for the size of its community alone. The comparison of community size may be extended to that of the state versus the national community. States, too, are concerned for local control, and there is little national growth policy because of this provincialism. I make these comparisons not to justify the position of one or to attack that of another, but to emphasize the relative provincialism of each level of scale. While each level may be only a part of the larger, there seems to be a definite relation between the attitudes and the community of concern. It should be self-evident that the individuals cannot be categorized according to their response to change, but it should become equally apparent that a response is dependent upon the scale of this community. Regardless of the subjugation of a small town community to the metropolitan community, the sub-communities to which people respond remain significant for the survey of attitudes which will influence development. Be it small town, county, or some other sub-community, each must be examined for the individual attitudes shaped by the community to which they respond.
The growth potential of Montgomery County has a very special effect upon the community leaders' relationship to each other and with the way they deal with the accompanying change. They distinguish among themselves by age, length of residency in the community, and financial position, but there appears to be little personal conflict. In the example of the savings and loan contest, there is competition for economic advantage, and yet, the effort is more like a game, as there seems to be a friendly competitiveness and the game is judged by positions on the team rather than who might win the contest. Most feel everyone will win; that is, gain economic advantage as the county experiences growth.

There are self-imposed distinctions among the merchants just as there are among the community leaders. There are those considered the old-timers and the young. The distinction is not so much individual age as time spent in the downtown. Here the real difference between the merchants' circumstance and that of the community leaders is clearest. The "young" merchants on the square are those who have been there for twenty-five years. These merchants still talk of themselves as being the challengers to the established merchants around them. It is as though the principal surge for the downtown began shortly after World War II, while at the community level, the leaders talk of a beginning that is barely five years old. To maintain the downtown's position as principal trade center for the county, the merchants appear to be depending upon a momentum which is twenty-five years old.
While the community leaders find a confidence to deal with county growth and take advantage of their favored position, the merchants see no new role to exploit. They look to a past advantage and talk of the special appeal of the downtown. Though the governmental role of the county may be a changing one, they depend upon it for continued customer attraction. The specialized service which attracted a clientele from as far away as Houston is admittedly a thing of the past. Still, the merchants are slow to adjust their merchandising techniques to the changing market. Most crucial to the future of the downtown, however, is the impact of the area growth upon the merchants' commitment to any action which might ease some of the problems they identify themselves. They are presently benefiting from the growth to such a degree, as witnessed by their sales volume, that problems are easily reduced to nuisances which can be dealt with at a later date. They seem to feel that there is no need to rush into corrective action when things are still so good downtown.

Rate of change is a factor of the stage of growth and it is also a factor of community heritage. For the merchants, the traditional role of the downtown is an important influence in their acceptance of change. The community leaders are less bound by a traditional role, even though Conroe has been a county influence for a number of years. They are not confronted with the problems that challenge the leaders of a community that possesses historical landmarks and the tradition of preservation. They prefer to promote a community heritage of progressiveness.
For both the community leaders and the downtown merchants the question of the impact of growth is a factor of the state of growth and the concomitant rate of change. Though the growth has been rapidly occurring for the last several years, in terms of drastic change, the impact has yet to be felt. The political power still lies with Conroe and its leaders are able to exploit this position rather than concentrate their efforts on defending it. The merchants are aware of the impact of the shopping centers and yet their business is continuing to grow. There is, however, anxiety over the prospects for the future. The merchants fear the onslaught of the discount houses and the giant merchandise marts, and the community leaders fear the encroachment of Houston and the eventual loss of control. Still, the realization of these fears is a thing of the future, and the changes they will introduce are only speculation.

From this further comparison of the attitudes of the downtown merchants and the community leaders, it is evident that territory or the community of concern is very much a part of their response to growth and change. It is also evident that the stage of growth or the rate of change has a significant effect upon response. In Conroe, territory, or the community of concern, and the stage of growth, or the rate of change, are the prime determinants of local attitudes which influence development.
The planning concepts of both community leaders and downtown merchants are bound to community territory. The leaders see their responsibilities of planning radiating out from Conroe until they come to an abrupt halt at the county line. Similarly, with the merchants there is a definite boundary to what they consider included in downtown planning efforts. For the downtown there is the aspect of physical constraints. The form of the square is a severe deterrent to its growth. As the square is defined by the streets and stores, it cannot be expanded without destroying a portion of downtown. Its form is exclusive so that the merchants are very conscious of being either on or off the square. Just as the community leaders' concern for the county is a factor of distance from Conroe, the merchants' concern for downtown is a factor of distance from the square. Downtown can only be extended so far beyond its boundaries before it ceases to be downtown, as evidenced by the exclusion of business from membership in the Downtown Merchants Association by virtue of their location relative to the square. This attitude toward their physical community significantly affects their concept of downtown planning and thus any planning action which might be initiated. For example, any action taken will center about the square. The parking problem is seen as a problem of the square. Vacant buildings on the square are much more disturbing than those off the square. If action is taken to correct such problems, how will the merchants operating stores off the square be convinced they should join in improving conditions on the square? While the territorial features of the downtown may
be typical of many small towns, these kinds of problems of the square are distinct from the linear downtown forms.

There is also a physical feature of the county community. As control center, Conroe is extended far beyond its immediate boundaries through the "finger annexations." The tentacles are extended into the county to assure Conroe leaders a say over future incorporations around the town. Though actual physical extensions of city boundaries, the tentacles are a means of control. However, when the community of Porter Heights asked the city to waive the extra-territorial jurisdiction affecting them, Conroe leaders, in effect, treated the control as though there was no other possibility than physical extension along these tentacles. By waiving their extra-territorial jurisdiction rights over the community, city leaders excluded Porter Heights from their concern as easily as they would have refused a request to extend city services beyond city limits. When the community of Panorama made a similar request to the city, city fathers hesitated, apparently because this community was physically closer. It is as though the "finger annexations" are extended for protection, but withdrawn when the question of planning arises. The question appears to be whether the city wishes to extend its immediate boundaries, those with tentacles withdrawn, or dismiss the community from the city's concern. From the standpoint of total community planning, which the city does seem to desire, this territorial fixation seems to be a great hindrance. The city should at least consult with the county planning commission before dismissing another community from their concern. From a regional
planning point of view, it would appear that the Houston-Galveston Area Council should also have a say in the incorporation of other communities in the county as the proliferation of governmental jurisdictions can be an impediment to comprehensive planning efforts.

The way community leaders choose to plan for growth within their community is a factor of current growth, but it is also shaped by their anticipations of the changes accompanying future growth. The Conroe leaders see themselves as progressive, and rather than resisting growth they welcome it. Some of the older leaders were Conroe residents during the oil boom, so to them rapid growth is no new phenomenon. More recently, community leaders have been particularly concerned for growth. They have disputed the findings of the last two U. S. Census reports claiming that there was a gross underestimation of population increase. Money from the Conroe Oil Field has insured Conroe an excellent school district and such amenities as an outstanding county library, and the community residents themselves have promoted a reputation of progressiveness. There are many signs which would indicate that Conroe might not be so easily associated with the stereotype sleepy town. Still, there are signs which indicate future community changes induced by metropolitan growth that exceed the anticipations of its leaders.

The county has been blessed with money from the oil field for forty years. In terms of community amenities, the impact upon the community has been significant, but except for the initial growth surge, the
changes introduced by the oil industry have been minimal. Prosperity has given the community the image of progressiveness, and yet the progressiveness has involved little community change. The leaders talk of changes that began only a few years ago with the extension of the interstate highway. They accept the challenge of responsibility for planning in a fashion that would serve them well in a second growth spurt like that of the oil boom. Governmental capacities are increased to cope with extended responsibilities, sewage treatment plants are enlarged to extend their capacities, more sanitary landfill sites are purchased, water storage is increased and town boundaries are extended. Unlike the oil boom growth, however, metropolitan growth is not concentrated in Conroe. Community planning must differ from what would be applicable for a small town experiencing growth from within, as with a "micropolis." Nor can Houston serve as a planning model. Ignoring the difference in scale, the city of Houston is the center of metropolitan growth. The planning alternatives for the central city are quite different from those of Conroe.

If the community leaders are intent upon being an influence in county planning, or at least in insuring some semblance of rational growth, there appear to be only two alternatives which can significantly affect such overwhelming growth potential. Both assume an awareness of the distinction between planning for internal and planning for an imposed growth, and a value in metropolitan planning coordination. The first alternative would be that the community leaders continue to accept the responsibility for planning within the county. They would
increase their communication with the Houston-Galveston Area Council to assure county planners an awareness of metropolitan concerns and to provide a channel for the coordination of planning throughout the metropolitan area. The planning responsibility would demand that they develop a planning system which is responsive to growth introduced into the county at various locations and at varying intensities. In effect, this would mean that the planning emphasis be on change rather than growth. Facilities and services would have to be expanded to cope with the increased demands for capacities, but the planning and control systems would have to be constantly adapting to the changing needs of the county and be responsive to the pressures of the metropolitan community. If the new town becomes the dominant political force in the county, centralization of control in Conroe can hardly be realized. The effort to expand city limits at a fast enough rate to control growth cannot be expected to keep pace with county growth. If Conroe cannot keep pace, another means of control must be developed. Growth to control growth is not the only planning alternative, nor is it the most responsive to change, and change will be the impact of growth in Montgomery County.

With this emphasis, local control would remain in the hands of the community leaders, but only by extending control throughout the county and by staying in constant touch with development outside the county through IGAC. Extension of control might be accomplished by including the major land owners and developers in county planning decisions. The community of concern of these separate parties could be linked
together to form a cooperative planning commission which would be truly responsive to county development.

The second planning alternative is that the community leaders become fully dependent upon the planning recommendations of the HGAC, and that they encourage the agency to develop a comprehensive plan that would include their county. This dependency would mean that the county planning commission, composed of both city and county representatives, serve primarily as an implementation body. The county leaders' need for recognition as progressives would be satisfied with this alternative, as they would be a part of a major planning effort--planning for the metropolis. Much of the pressures of planning for an imposed growth which threatens local autonomy would be relieved by accepting a new role as a unit of a much larger community involved in dealing with its problems of growth. The alliance with the larger community would assure the community leaders a voice in the initial stages of planning and they would avoid the risk of yielding their influence over county affairs at a later date through default.

While the leaders of Conroe are fully aware of the impending growth for their community, they appear less aware of the changes that it will mean for them. In anticipation of the growth they are actively enlarging the city and county services, and yet there is a lack of planning for change. Still, they are sensitive to change, due to their community heritage, the imposition of growth, and their desire for local control. They are also open to innovation. The health
district, for example, was only the fourth such district in the state. It seems at this stage in the growth of the community, with its effect upon the leaders, as the desire for progressiveness, the confidence, the amiability, and this openness to innovation, the community is primed for some comprehensive planning that would be responsive to change. If the second planning alternative is pursued there is the crucial factor of time to consider. A comprehensive plan developed by the HGAC may be some time in coming. Can the Conroe community leaders afford to wait upon a regional plan when the growth is unimpeded? Development around the lake is in progress and the development of the new town is to begin construction in the fall of 1972. With the stage of development in the county and with the impetus of the new town at hand, community leaders might do well to take the first alternative and initiate contacts with the developers and improve communications with the HGAC in order to realize their full planning potential. Montgomery County could possibly become the example of planning for metropolitan growth through an emphasis upon change and the maintenance of local control.
APPENDIX
METROPOLITAN SENSOR

Because of the special sensitivity to changes of small towns like Conroe, they provide an opportunity to monitor metropolitan growth. Each town within the area could serve as sensor to the impact of growth and change. The responses they record could be relayed back to a central data bank, so that community reactions could be compared for differences of stage of growth, size of the community, etc. An inter-disciplinary analysis of the collected information could provide a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated impacts of metropolitan growth. In addition to the communication link with the central data bank, this kind of information could be shared with other small towns in the system so that there is an open dialogue between those who are in the various stages of metropolitan growth.

With such a flow of information, and the fact that it would be an ongoing process, at any point in time, planning decisions could be based upon current responses to growth. The stage of development of the individual community, its physical and functional circumstance, the reaction of its people to their condition, and their anticipations of the future would be a part of public and private planning rationale. Major highway routes could be planned with a sensitivity to community impact. Community impact could become a meaningful input into the location strategy of government facilities. Industrial locations
could be based on more than proximity to transportation facilities and available resources. Prior to the decision to locate within or near a community, there could be a feeling for community reaction to the industrial facility based upon present stage of development, political and social stability, past ability to adapt to changes within the community, their sense of territorial concern, etc. The same would hold true for other land uses. The effects of the development of a major shopping center upon a town could be anticipated, not just in terms of economic impact, but how local merchants would be expected to compensate for the impact. A developer planning a residential project within the political jurisdiction of a community could include in his planning rationale information which anticipates community reaction of both a political and social nature.

Such a system of metropolitan communications could conceivably be expanded statewide, so that information could be shared from one metropolitan system to the next. Included in the state system could be those communities outside the metropolitan areas. Monitoring these communities could reveal much on why some show a tendency to grow and others to decline. State efforts to assist those declining areas, such as Governor Smith's proposals for industrial location policies, could be founded on an in-depth understanding of a community's needs and capacities for recovery. Distribution of state funds could be based on a community's capacity for utilization. Not all communities can be expected to prosper regardless of the funds that may be available for each one. In its final form, such a statewide system of monitoring change due to the urbanization of the state of Texas
could be utilized to create a state growth policy. The policy would be founded on a day to day awareness of how the people of Texas respond to the changes brought about by a growing and prospering state community.
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