

August 15, 1967

AN ARGUMENT FOR AN ALTERNATE PLAN

There are 3 basic reasons for doing an alternate plan for the 150 acres of land.

(1) The completion of an alternate plan will put the community in a much more enhanced bargaining position concerning construction in the 150 acre site and in Newark generally. This is because of the additional factor of knowledge. Too many times we react to what is being done out of blindness and ignorance. It is harder to keep an informed person down. Even if the idea of total or large scale community involvement fails, there will certainly be at least 10 or 20 people who can now sit down with Danzig, or people from HUD or other officialdom and appraise their statements critically. The decisions being made about urban affairs these days require much perception in depth; caucuses decide people's lives. We ought to at least want to develop a small group of people from the community who can play around on these higher levels of power, and know as much about the procedure and substance as the officialdom in power. Development of an alternate plan can make this possible.

(2) There is another important aspect to be considered in relation to acquisition of knowledge about planning and the needs of the community. All too often, we who advocate change for poor black people become too content to stay on the defensive. Even though there will be much need to defend, and counter attack, it will be to our advantage to be able to assert independently what we want for the community. Real legitimacy is based on concrete proposals grounded in affirmative action. An alternate plan will certainly enable the people in the neighborhood to say what should or should not be.

(3) It should be obvious to everyone by now that poverty cannot be solved by the mere institution of new programs for housing or anything else. Certainly better physical facilities are a necessary component of a plan for a better life for the poor people of Newark, specifically poor black people; however, housing is not sufficient in and of itself.

What is needed is a sense of belonging, a pride in one's neighborhood, a feeling of home that most people do not have. Urban renewal destroys physical neighborhoods and makes people drift into other slums. Bad housing and vacant lots give little to be proud of. People therefore exist in their present hovels until the Federal bulldozer returns to move them out again.

We must break this vicious circle. An alternate plan will provide us with an opportunity to talk to people about concepts of community. Involving them in the future planning of their neighborhood must begin by convincing people that their land is worth fighting for. Houses need replacement or rehabilitation; it is up to them to stand and fight for this housing.

Furthermore, by participating in an alternate plan, people will come to realize that they should control this community to the extent to saying what should happen and what should not happen to its physical character. The concept of community must include a concept of the right to say what's going on there.

These ideals are not far-fetched. It will be an organizer's job but I believe the concepts can be gotten across. The end product should be a community ready to use whatever means necessary to put forward their concept of "community". This will put urban renewal and city run communities into a different perspective for people.

Any of the above three points can justify a drive to get money to make a plan a possibility. I suggest that we begin work immediately drawing up a more detailed proposal putting forward the case for an alternate plan based on what we know to be wrong with this one.

To guarantee that our appeal for resources does not land on deaf ears at whatever place of potential funding we seek out, we should make an effort to build up as much citywide support for the concept as possible.

We of Vista have information about the medical school proposal and all its ramifications and corollaries to make such a drive for support possible; we believe that there is much evidence that will convince people of the folly of the medical school, and that we can stop its initiation for any number of reasons. I believe enthusiasm for support of a plan may be conditional upon community people's faith in our ability to get the time necessary to make the plan a possibility. We feel that we can, in fact, display to the greater community the weaknesses of the medical school idea, as well as actually bringing the proposal to a sure downfall either in the courts or via administrative channels using this same information.

Our biggest problem will thereafter become a matter of convincing people in Newark that the whole concept of a plan can be successful in the terms articulated in the first three points made. Also we must convince people that it can be a viable way of getting the housing and other facilities needed in the 150 acre site.

JW:lmg