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# A case study of the Northwest District Association and Portland City planning staff

Jill Sally Haldeman  
*Portland State University*

Kathryn Cynara Heisler  
*Portland State University*

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A CASE STUDY OF THE NORTHWEST DISTRICT ASSOCIATION  
AND PORTLAND CITY PLANNING STAFF

by

JILL SALLY HALDEMAN  
and  
KATHRYN CYNARA HEISLER

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TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Jill  
Sally Haldeman and Kathryn Cynara Heisler presented June 7, 1972.

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Gerald Frey, Chairman

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David Yaden

APPROVED:

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Gordon Hearn, Dean of School of Social Work

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II HISTORY.....	11
III N.W.D.A. - STAFF RELATIONSHIP.....	20
IV SUB-COMMITTEE WORK AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS.....	27
V FREEWAY ISSUE.....	40
VI GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL ISSUE.....	52
VII CONCLUSION.....	59
VIII SUGGESTED POLICY FOR DISTRICT PLANNING.....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	71

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## FREEWAY ISSUE

### Introduction

In 1965 plans were finalized concerning a freeway that would be placed through the Northwest part of Portland, to run along the northern boundary. This freeway (I-505) would be connected to another major freeway (I-405) by a new proposed bridge. NWDA took an interest in this proposal, since both freeways would influence their neighborhood.

This chapter will focus upon several tasks undertaken by the NWDA and PCPC Staff in their efforts to deal with the proposed freeway. In identifying the relationship NWDA had with Staff around the freeway issue, it became clear that certain areas of confusion developed. NWDA was not always clear as to the role Staff was playing, nor of Staff's expectation for NWDA. The roles of both PCPC Staff and NWDA varied as they encountered different tasks, but confusion centered primarily around NWDA's expectation of Staff taking a more political role than they had taken in the sub-committee work and neighborhood meetings.

The initial relationship between NWDA and some PCPC Staff occurred when the State Highway Commission contracted PCPC and their staff to do a study of the possibilities for multiple uses and joint development of the proposed freeway through Northwest Portland. This report was later called the Blue Book Report. PCPC Staff were asked to ascertain the type of freeway that would be most acceptable to residents and landowners in the district. They assumed the leadership role, in this initial contact by presenting the alternative plans to NWDA. Members of PCPC Staff, different from those staff members later to work with NWDA on the Comprehensive Plan, asked NWDA to hold a public meeting, March 17, 1970, to present the alternative plans for freeway elevation and alignment. In this initial relationship, Staff viewed the role

of NWDA as representing residential interests, and also as a vehicle to involve other Northwest residents.

NWDA publicized the meeting, inviting residents as well as NWDA members. One-hundred people attended the meeting to act as representatives of the area. At this particular meeting Staff presented the six freeway alternatives prepared by PCPC Staff and the State Highway Commission. They used their professional expertise to develop a comparative analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each plan, which they presented at the meeting. This placed PCPC Staff in a technician's role. NWDA voted on their choice of freeway alignment. This choice had an underlying implication important in later freeway discussions. Since NWDA did not oppose the freeway at this time, it implied they had accepted the proposed corridor on the northern boundary of their district. This contact between NWDA and PCPC Staff can be viewed as successful since it satisfied the expectations of both parties.

In this beginning contact with Northwest Portland, Staff took the responsibility of contacting non-resident interest groups. For example, they held a meeting with business and industrial interests in the area to discuss freeway alternatives. However, later on when NWDA was working with new PCPC Staff to develop the Comprehensive Plan, NWDA was expected to see that business and other interests were involved in the plan.

Staff utilized the opinions received from the residents, business and industry to write the Blue Book Report. This report was to be presented to City Council for approval before sending it, officially, to the State Highway Commission.

By this time the two staff members, who were involved in planning with NWDA, were already working with them. In February, 1971 these staff, at the

request of the Planning Department, presented to NWDA the possible uses of land along the freeway corridors. Staff assumed the role of technician in this relationship, while expecting NWDA to take the political role of voting on the plans presented. NWDA members were in agreement with Staff's report but felt they could present some additional points to City Council to insure the livability of their neighborhood. These four points included:

- (1) Supporting the concept of multiple uses for the corridor.
- (2) The same number of residential units taken out by the freeway should be replaced in Northwest Portland.
- (3) The families who are relocated by the freeway should be permitted to remain in Northwest Portland and replacement housing should be supplied.
- (4) The freeway traffic, both coming on and off, should be re-routed to the north side of the freeway, that NWDA would not consider any north-south streets as arterials but rather as neighborhood commercial streets.

Also, NWDA voted to adopt the objectives of PCPC concerning the freeway as objectives of NWDA. NWDA did not believe they could legally oppose the freeway at this time.

#### NWDA in The Leadership Role

NWDA held a series of meetings discussing the four points and their legal implications. They decided that a social survey of the corridor might be used to back their positions. NWDA took the initiative in contacting PCPC and requesting that the social survey be completed. PCPC allotted funds for a paid staff person to act as technician, and NWDA volunteered the use of their name and volunteer interviewers for the survey. NWDA decided that some of their members and the paid PCPC staff person would train these volunteers. When completed, this social survey successfully gave evidence that areas in transition



from residential to industrial, and those affected by freeway corridors, were in danger of chronic social ills.<sup>1</sup> NWDA hoped that their four points would be adopted by the Highway Commission to combat these social ills.

Both NWDA and Staff considered the survey a success. This success may be attributed in part to the degree of certainty NWDA had about their goals. They took the leadership role and assigned the role of technician, with specific duties, to the staff. Both NWDA and Staff were certain of their own role and the tasks they were to accomplish in the survey.

#### Evolving Conflict in Expectations

At the City Council hearing of the PCPC Staff Blue Book Report, NWDA gave an organized presentation of their four points. The four points were not part of the Planning Commission's report. The Staff did not feel that they should take an official stand for or against NWDA's positions.<sup>2</sup> Staff saw themselves, at this point, as technicians and did not consider themselves as advocates for NWDA. A question of Staff advocacy developed around this issue since NWDA hoped that the City Council and PCPC Staff would act as an advocate for their four points. However, their opinions were not adequately communicated at the hearing. City Council voted that the Blue Book Report prepared by PCPC Staff and an extract from presentations at the hearing be forwarded to the State Highway Commission for its use in planning the freeway corridor. A PCPC Staff, not working with NWDA, summarized the presentation and sent it to the Highway Commission. The citizens' positions were not incorporated into the City Council position. A City Commissioner read the proposal, felt the citizen suggestions had been "too watered down," and attempted to rewrite the letter; however, the first letter was sent before the second could be submitted. In the submitted

letter the NWDA's four points were not actually written as part of the Planning Commission's report.

NWDA members felt that the City Council was greatly impressed by the orderly and well-presented position of NWDA regarding their four points for the freeway. They also believed that Staff suggested to the Highway Commission that they accept these four points. They thought that their four points were fundamentally a part of PCPC's proposal and that City Council and PCPC Staff were supporting NWDA's position.<sup>3</sup> Actually, PCPC did not feel it was their position to take a stand on NWDA's proposal.

Later, when the State Highway Commission did not indicate acceptance of NWDA's four points, NWDA believed they had been disregarded. NWDA felt jilted, that PCPC had not presented their four points in a forceful enough manner. They expected PCPC Staff to see that their four points would be incorporated into the PCPC plan presented to the Highway Commission. Staff had to reiterate that this had not been their function.

#### Development of NWDA-WHNA Joint Proposal

About this time WHNA (Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association), another neighborhood group, became concerned that the Highway Commission was not taking into consideration the points they had presented at the previous City Council hearing. At that hearing Willamette Heights had proposed that the Highway Commission follow the conditions of a federal environmental impact act. They questioned whether the environmental act was being violated in the freeway construction. WHNA's president initiated contact with NWDA over this concern. NWDA members met with WHNA to explore common concerns over the freeway corridor. At the meeting a joint proposal was suggested, although this had not been the

original purpose of the meeting. Basically the joint proposal included; (1) previous positions on the I-505 Freeway Project taken by the NWDA and WHNA; (2) a comparison of the performance of the Oregon State Highway Commission to the requirements of the Federal Environmental guidelines; and (3) conclusions and recommendations. PCPC Staff were not involved in this proposal writing.

The NWDA president approached a lawyer to assess the feasibility of some kind of court action. The lawyer indicated that there was a good chance the views could be put forth forcefully in litigation based upon legal precedent. He suggested that they halt freeway construction by going to court on the basis that the Highway Department had not upheld Federal Environmental guidelines. When the proposal and the lawyer's suggestions were presented to NWDA board members and planning committee, there was much disagreement. Some members felt that it was not the duty of the committee that talked with WHNA to develop a joint proposal in the first place.<sup>4</sup>

PCPC Staff, informally, felt the fight would be idealistic and the Highway Commission was now beginning to act upon NWDA's four points. They were afraid that NWDA would be putting all of their energy into one issue by trying to stop the freeway construction for an environmental impact study and lose Highway Commission consideration of their previous four points. Staff felt sympathy for WHNA proposal but did not feel NWDA could help. They saw the push for a change in alternate routes to the freeway as coming too late. It was stressed that the summer neighborhood meetings showed that the citizens would not be willing to remain in doubt about the freeway issue for much longer.

Some NWDA members were displeased with PCPC Staff because they felt their proposals had not been backed by Staff when presented to the Highway Commission by PCPC. Staff had to repeat that it had not been PCPC's role to take a political

stand on this issue. Also, one of the City Commissioners had attempted to present their four points more forcefully, but the letter had not been written in time to send it to the State Highway Commission. This developing dissatisfaction of NWDA with PCPC may have had some effect on discounting Staff's view against fighting the new freeway.

Some NWDA members felt that the best way to fight the freeway was still through their original four points. Furthermore, attempting to stop the freeway construction in court proceedings changed NWDA's official position. Other members felt that if an environmental impact study was completed it could include NWDA's original four points. They said that NWDA had a right to change positions, and it was a question of which tool could be used to get the best results for Northwest Portland.

#### Planning Staff Role

PCPC Staff had no formal role in the process of deciding which course of action should be taken against the freeway. Informally they told NWDA that nothing could be done to change the freeway route and that NWDA would be wasting its time.

Throughout NWDA's involvement with the freeway issue, Staff, without official request from NWDA, informed NWDA of State Highway Commission decisions. Staff took the initiative of going to the state capitol and having some contact with the Highway Commission. Staff was very helpful to NWDA in finding out when public hearings would be held, and decisions made about freeway development. Occasionally NWDA was dissatisfied that they were not notified about important dates, but it was not the Planning Staff's duty to assume this role. NWDA members frequently spoke of the importance of having someone inform them of developing decisions effecting the neighborhood. Staff did not always feel

they had the time to find out what was necessary, and NWDA did not feel that they could take on this task without a paid staff person. Neither PCPC Staff nor NWDA saw informing each other of important meetings and issues as their responsibility. PCPC Staff, as a result, was forced to take the initiative.

### The Freeway Hearing

Plaintiffs in the suit against the State Highway Commission over the proposed routing of I-505 were NWDA and WHNA. They contended that Highway officials failed to hold public hearings and violated federal environmental requirements in failing to study alternate routes. They also contended that west bound off ramps under construction from a new bridge had already predetermined the freeway corridor. Highway officials maintained that corridor hearings were held in 1964; that environmental impact studies were presently underway; that off ramps, actually part of another new freeway, did not predetermine the freeway corridor.<sup>5</sup>

Once NWDA entered the suit, Staff informally supported NWDA's position. This pending court decision was viewed by both Staff and NWDA as vital for the continued motivation of NWDA members and Northwest citizens. Both felt citizens needed tangible successes to remain active in the planning. Both saw the final decision as important because it would effect the proposed comprehensive plan for Northwest Portland.

### Development of I-505 Section of the Comprehensive Plan

No special committee was established to write the goals and objectives concerning the freeway to be part of the Comprehensive Plan. In February, 1971, one Staff member took the initiative to write an introductory statement for the preliminary Staff paper of Northwest Goals and Objectives to be used as a guide for the NWDA working sub-committees. He included NWDA's four points in this

statement. Although Staff took the initiative in writing this section, no one was specifically designated to review what was written. As a result, the revised edition of Goals and Objectives written in November of 1971, was still the original Staff writing. These were reviewed, with possible corrections and additions, by the NWDA sub-committees at a planning retreat. None were made.

Planning Staff questioned the wording of the Goals and Objectives for this section. Since the Highway Commission had been taken to court, Staff questioned whether the four points should be changed to read "if" the corridor is chosen at the hearing. Planning Staff's question was not answered by NWDA at the retreat. This is one more example of how Staff were forced to assume an extra task because no one from NWDA had been assigned the responsibility.

#### Summary

Initial contact between Staff and NWDA was with staff different from those later involved in the comprehensive plan development and centered around the presentation of alternate alignment plans for a future freeway (I-505 and I-405). In this first contact, Planning Staff assumed the leadership role in contacting NWDA and in presenting the plans. In addition, Staff took the responsibility of contacting business and industrial interests to gain further input. Staff viewed NWDA as representative of residents in the neighborhood. This NWDA role was different from their later role of gathering suggestions from other Northwest residents, as well as from business and industry. This initial relationship met both parties' expectations since they both functioned in their designated roles.

Planning Staff again initiated contact with NWDA concerning discussion of possible land uses for freeway corridors. Out of this contact grew NWDA's four points concerning the freeway.

Planning Staff and NWDA worked together to do a study of the residents who would be affected by the future freeway corridors. NWDA was able to successfully accomplish their goal of conducting a social survey when they took the leadership role; were clear on what they wanted accomplished; and defined the Planning Staff's role as technician and PCPC's role as financier.

When NWDA presented their four points to City Council, they expected that they would be incorporated in the proposal to the Highway Commission. However, NWDA did not present their four points to City Council in this manner. When the four points were not included as part of PCPC's report, since Staff felt it was not their job to take a political stand, NWDA felt jilted. When Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association contacted NWDA concerning the Highway Commission's activities, NWDA leadership had just changed hands. Members were disillusioned with PCPC not presenting their four points strongly enough, and the possibility that the Highway Commission would not act on their points was becoming more eminent. The WHNA and NWDA meeting resulted in the writing of a joint proposal which produced much conflict within the NWDA. The final decision was that NWDA would continue with the hearing, in spite of Staff expressing concern over their success. This brings out the question of Staff loyalty. If NWDA had divided over this conflict with which group would Staff continue their relationship?

The role of Staff at this time was to inform NWDA of relevant Highway Commission activity. This was not Staff's responsibility and was not always accomplished satisfactorily, since Staff did not have the time nor felt it was their responsibility to find out what was happening for NWDA. This is one role that could be assumed more effectively by a paid Staff person working for the neighborhood association.

Planning Staff wrote the portion of the Comprehensive Plan concerning the freeway from the four points accepted by the NWDA and general feelings expressed at the meetings. No one was designated to review the Goals and Objectives and no corrections or additions to them were made by NWDA. This is another example of how Staff took the initiative when tasks were not clearly designated to NWDA.

In the development of the freeway issue it can be seen that roles were not always clearly defined as to who was to take the initiative. As a result, NWDA members and/or Staff were not always satisfied with the results. Tasks were not always successfully completed. A question of Staff advocacy arose in the Blue Book report issue. Most satisfactory results concerning the social survey completed by both NWDA and Staff occurred when NWDA took the leadership role and clearly communicated their expectation for Staff.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Pintarich, "Youths Add Pep to NW Portland," The Oregonian, February 10, 1971.

The report that developed was later used, in part, in the interim reports prepared by Staff ("A Study of Conditions, Problems and Potentials" and "A Study of Social Factors"), and was presented to citizens, City Council and PCPC to familiarize them to conditions of Northwest Portland in relation to the coming Comprehensive Plan. It was also used in writing the Comprehensive Plan.

<sup>2</sup> At this same hearing another neighborhood association, Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association (WHNA), presented their position on the freeway corridor.

- (1) An impact study for a proposed Environmental Statement.
- (2) Participation in decision-making process by citizens effected by the freeway.
- (3) Stop removal of residents pending an adequate consideration of alternate transportation systems.

WHNA, as Portland residents, also had the right to give suggestions in regards to the Blue Book report. They too had a right to expect City Council to place their suggestions in the report to the Highway Commission.

<sup>3</sup> NWDA minutes, 3-16-71.

<sup>4</sup> About this time there was a change in leadership within NWDA.

<sup>5</sup> The Oregonian, October 18, 1971.

Results of the hearing were in favor of NWDA and WHNA and stipulated further environmental impact studies. This does not mean, however, that the freeway corridor will be moved.