Harold Washington’s Chicago: Placing a

by Larry Bennett

Harold Washington served as mayor of Chicago from May, 1983, until his death by heart attack on November 25, 1987—the city’s first Black mayor. During Washington’s frequently tumultuous four-and-one-half year tenure, he led a “rainbow” political coalition of Blacks, Hispanics, and whites, while articulating a philosophy of governance emphasizing economic justice, procedural reform, and citizen participation. Washington brought into his administration a variety of neighborhood activists and opponents of the city’s regular Democratic party organization. During his term of office, the city government inaugurated a long list of new programs, sought to reshape previously defined local policies, and encountered intense criticism and bitter political opposition.

The Washington administration’s agenda matched several of the programmatic aims and accomplishments of the governments in “progressive cities” such as Hartford, Conn.; Cleveland; Berkeley and Santa Monica, Calif.; and Burlington, Vermont. By examining the intentions, accomplishments, and failures of the Washington administration, we can locate it within this emergent trend in local governance. Furthermore, the experience of the Washington years in Chicago offers some important clues regarding the opportunities and risks confronting progressive political movements in other American cities.

THE CONTEMPORARY URBAN PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

In order to place the Washington record in a broader context, we should consider what contemporary progressives have done in other American cities. Pierre Clavel’s The Progressive City, the most comprehensive examination of contemporary urban progressivism, defined the overall shape of this movement as one committed to “programs emphasizing public planning as an alternative to private power, and to grassroots citizen participation as an alternative to council-dominated representation.”

In essence, the uses of planning and participation, not as polarities but as complementary components of governance, anchor Clavel’s interpretation of progressive movements in city politics.

Clavel’s approach to the uses of citizen participation is consistent with the ideology of participatory democracy that has grounded much neighborhood activism in American cities since the 1960s. However, his characterization of planning has a more unique meaning and deserves special attention.

Clavel departs from orthodox planning models in his assumption that planning will lead to creative solutions requiring institutional innovation. Often, these innovations grow from the involvement of citizens in the development of policy and the guidance of program implementation. This is the point at which planning and participation become complementary. Furthermore, Clavel’s concept of planning incorporates an inclusive understanding of community that is not typically associated with the professional or technocratic meanings of the term.

Three substantive aims consistently appear in Clavel’s analysis of progressive administrations and in the discussions of their movements by progressive activists. The most important of these is economic equity. As municipal governments are constrained from directly redistributing income and wealth, the pursuit of economic equity is carried out by indirect means. For example, Norman Krumholz, Cleveland’s city planning director from 1969 to 1979, has written of his staff’s intention to provide “more choices to those who have few, if any choices.” In Cleveland during the 1970s, this commitment took shape in efforts to enhance mass transit access for the city’s poorest neighborhoods, to sustain low utility charges within the city, and to plan cooperatively with neighborhood organizations. As leader of Hartford’s dominant city council faction during the 1970s, Nicholas Carbone used development negotiations to guarantee jobs for Hartford residents and storefronts for small-scale entrepreneurs.

The second substantive aim of con-
progressive influence on neighborhood planning. However, the neighborhood policies are also influenced by community connections to the city. The Washington neighborhood planning system is designed to empower community residents to influence policies that affect their lives. The system encourages participation in decision-making processes, allowing residents to voice their concerns and influence policy outcomes. In essence, the Washington neighborhood planning system is a powerful tool for residents to shape their community.

Progressive City Planning in Context

The city of Washington is governed by neighborhood policies that are consistent with the city's overall goals. These policies are designed to ensure the city's future by promoting equitable development and sustainability. Residents are encouraged to engage in the planning process, fostering a sense of community and empowerment. The city's approach to planning is a reflection of its commitment to progressive city planning, where residents have a say in shaping their community's future.
Social Policy

Monetary Authority and Other Progressive Cities: A Precedent for Development Approaches

Although the development approaches of monetary authority and other progressive cities, such as New York and Copenhagen, have provided important lessons for the development of the American city, the model of the American city is not fully comprehensible to the urban economist. The American city is a complex and multifaceted entity, with a rich history and a diverse set of economic, social, and political dynamics. The development approaches of these cities have demonstrated the importance of integrating economic, social, and political considerations into the urban planning process.

The development approaches of New York and Copenhagen have both been characterized by a focus on the needs of the citizen. In New York, this focus has been reflected in the city's commitment to public transportation, which has been a key factor in reducing traffic congestion and improving quality of life. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a cycling-friendly environment, which has helped to reduce air pollution and improve public health.

The development approaches of both cities have also been characterized by a commitment to sustainability. In New York, this has been reflected in the city's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, which have included investments in renewable energy and a focus on reducing waste. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a green city, with a strong commitment to sustainable energy and a focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The development approaches of both cities have also been characterized by a commitment to equity. In New York, this has been reflected in the city's efforts to reduce economic inequality, which have included investments in affordable housing and a focus on providing opportunities for all citizens. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a more equitable society, with a strong commitment to social justice and a focus on reducing poverty.

The development approaches of both cities have also been characterized by a commitment to innovation. In New York, this has been reflected in the city's efforts to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, which have included investments in technology and a focus on creating a supportive environment for business. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a culture of innovation, with a strong commitment to research and development and a focus on creating a supportive environment for creativity.

The development approaches of both cities have also been characterized by a commitment to collaboration. In New York, this has been reflected in the city's efforts to work with a variety of stakeholders, including businesses, non-profits, and community organizations, to create a more inclusive and resilient city. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a collaborative environment, with a strong commitment to partnerships and a focus on creating a supportive environment for collaboration.

The development approaches of both cities have also been characterized by a commitment to transparency. In New York, this has been reflected in the city's efforts to provide citizens with access to information, which have included investments in open data and a focus on creating a more informed and engaged citizenry. In Copenhagen, the focus has been on creating a transparent and accountable government, with a strong commitment to open data and a focus on creating a more accountable and responsive government.
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Social Policy

Washington enacted a "social policy" 80 years ago, strengthening the nation's fabric. Today, our new "social policy" in action, the Washington model is unraveling the fabric of our society. The Washington model was created by the Pennington Committee in the 1920s. It focused on the principles of social equity and economic efficiency. Washington's "social policy" involved creating a robust social safety net, promoting economic growth, and ensuring a high standard of living. It was based on two core principles: the provision of social services and the promotion of economic development.

The Washington Model

The Washington model was based on the idea that a strong economy and a stable society are interdependent. It aimed to create a balance between economic growth and social equity. The model was designed to ensure that everyone in society could benefit from economic progress. It involved a combination of government intervention and market forces.

The Washington model is often cited as a model for other countries to follow. It is seen as a successful example of how a society can achieve economic prosperity while maintaining social equity. The model has been influential in shaping social policy in many countries around the world.
At the end of the neighborhood years, cities had access to greater fiscal and technical resources for problem-solving.
files of urban progressives. He also demonstrated how planning can join its traditional land use focus to an emphasis on economic development. Like governing progressives in other cities, Harold Washington and his administration found that linking planning to participation was more difficult. In part this was because of Chicago's size and the municipal government's fiscal constraints. But, in addition, Washington's administration, from the start, encountered hostile neighborhood mobilization in some parts of the city. The city's long-standing racial polarization undermined the administration's ability to win over these neighborhood critics. Yet it is equally true that Harold Washington and his supporters did not find a way to bridge this divide, which confronts progressives in most of the country's large, ethnically diverse cities.

NOTES
3Clavel, The Progressive City, p.10.
6Ibid., p. 30.