

# Two plans

## One not too bad, another not as good

By ROD SPEER

The city of College Station is deeply involved in two projects designed to guide and order priorities for needed improvements in the city.

One project, long-range in scope, concerns almost all aspects of city growth, deals with large potential funding sources and involves the work of a Dallas-based urban consulting firm.

The other, relatively short range, concerns the needs of low and moderate income areas, deals with a very limited funding source and requires citizen participation.

In terms of value to the community, the latter project is proving to be far more dynamic.

The former project, initiated in January of 1973, is the making of a Comprehensive Development Plan, outlining programs the city needs to do in the next 15 years. The consulting firm hired by the city to do the plan examines and makes recommendations on future land use, city size and character, economic development, parks and recreation, education, city administration, health and safety measures, cultural development and citizen participation in city government.

Citizen participation was an integral part of formulating the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan, but the lasting effect of that participation is questionable. The long and short-range goals of the comprehensive plan, presented to the City Council in a summary report Tuesday, are largely rhetorical and, at best, are overgeneralizations.

For example, the long-range goals of educational development in the city are to "provide each citizen the opportunity to fully develop his or her individual capabilities and potential." The short-range objectives include supporting three A&M Consolidated School District projects, encouraging community-wide use of school facilities and encouraging the full use of all educational programs offered through the university.

For these type of comments, a citizen advisory committee was established and an estimated 500 College Station citizens were contacted.

Citizen participation in another city project, the implementation of the Community Development Block Grant Program, has taken a different form and, in contrast, appears to be having an immediate positive effect on the community.

This year's block grant, administered through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, amounts to only \$71,000, not very much money in terms of city projects. (At the going price of \$24 a linear foot, a city could pave only a short segment of street with that money.) Use of the funds is limited to low to moderate income areas or to "urgent community development needs." Evidence of citizen input in setting spending priorities and approval of the final plan is essential.

At first glance, the citizen participation procedure for spending the

meager federal funds seems over-involved. However, the low-income neighborhoods affected by the grant are about to realize more than \$71,000 worth of city services.

The citizen participation process began with the city planner designating four neighborhoods in town to benefit under the grant. Since mid-January, a representative of the planner's office met separately with residents of the four areas to hear their problems.

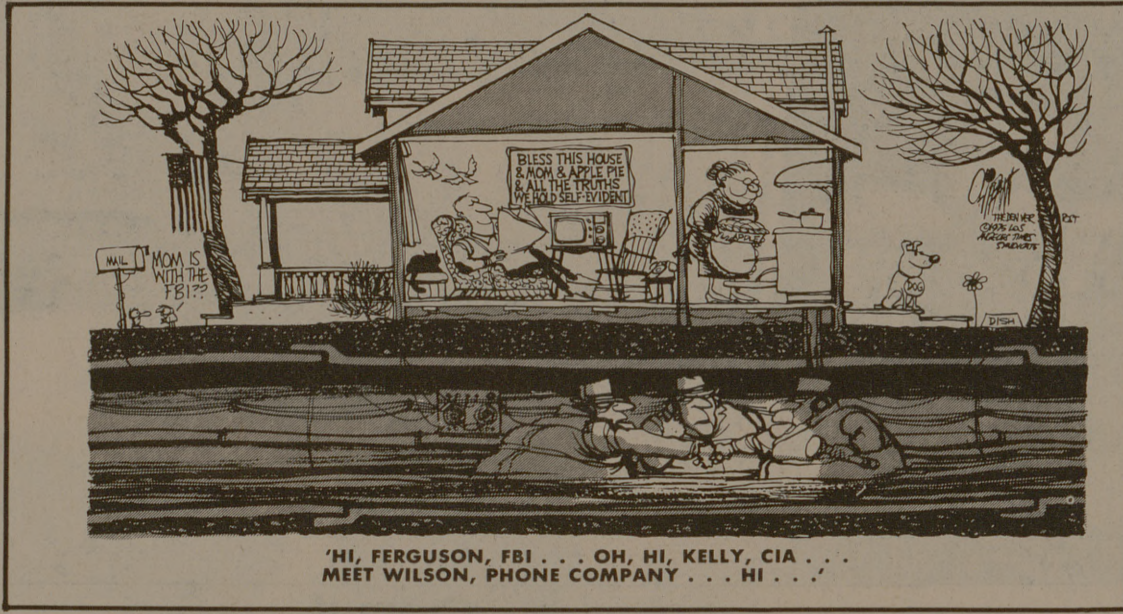
The response was good and, lo and behold, the city staff learned these areas are long overdue in getting some very basic city services.

The neighborhood residents didn't ask for parks, recreational facilities or the planting of trees—they asked for street paving to get to and from their homes, storm sewers so that rain doesn't make lakes out of front yards, adequate water pressure to run washing machines and street lights for security.

Al Mayo of the planner's office, who met with the neighborhood residents, has told those residents most of their requests should have been taken care of out of regular city maintenance efforts and the city engineer has promised action along that line.

When representatives of the neighborhoods met with the Planning and Zoning Commission Monday they asked that the \$71,000 (and Community Development funds for the next couple years) go for street pavings in their areas.

As it looks now, the depressed neighborhoods will get their cake and eat it too. The city (pending the certain approval of the council) will give them the paved streets and are committed to solving the drainage, water pressure and other pressing problems in those areas. That's a far cry better than the rhetoric-oriented citizen involvement in the Comprehensive Development Plan



'HI, FERGUSON, FBI . . . OH, HI, KELLY, CIA . . . MEET WILSON, PHONE COMPANY . . . HI . . .'

### The Aggie forum

#### 'Gator aid

R. B. EKELUND, JR. Professor of Economics

It is doubtful that Adam Smith, philosopher and "father" of economics, ever saw an alligator. (In a zoo perhaps?) But he might have had them in mind in his "Wealth of Nations" (1776) when noting that, (a) government interference in "natural" systems would produce undesirable results, often the opposite of those intended, and; (b) that unregulated private property and self-interest would promote the interests of society. Though Smith really had human social systems in mind, his principles apply, even more dramatically, to regulation of ecological systems.

A hilarious example of legislative bumbling may be used to illustrate Adam Smith's point. The Louisiana alligator "problem" has received a good deal of attention recently, but its plight harks back to the 1950's when hunting gators for fun and profit all but decimated the population. The State of Louisiana acted on

pressure from environmentalist groups and its Wildlife and Fisheries Commission by passing a law protecting alligators. In 1972 and 1973, however, the population had so increased that the state Commission legalized brief hunting seasons in those years. Predictably, environmentalists were outraged, and with the passage of the federal Endangered Species Act, the gators came under the umbrella of legislative protection.

The Louisiana alligator, for the present, has been saved from man, but who will save man from the alligator whose swamp population is now conservatively estimated at 300,000, with 25,000 to 30,000 on private refuge lands. A full-grown 400-pound alligator consumes 40 to 70 pounds of food frogs, fish, corn, calves and deer a week. A chief administrator for the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission argued that 50,000 could be hunted and killed each year without affecting population growth. Federal bureaucrats, however, under pressure from groups such as the National Audubon Society have steadfastly refused. The NAS did help the state transfer 5,000 gators to other states recently, but not nearly enough to offset a burgeoning population.

One of Smith's great principles, and a corollary of his principle of natural liberty, is that man can never know enough to tinker successfully with natural systems. Successful gator aid would require the bureaucrats implementing the Endangered Species Act to first have a good idea of what an optimal or desired population of gators is. Secondly, and more importantly, they must possess a fundamental knowledge of the natural ecological system surrounding alligators, including human participation in that sys-

tem, so that the desired optimum stock could be maintained.

On these counts, how have bureaucratic interferences fared? The alligator is simply a lot tougher and durable than was anticipated. In a food crisis, they will eat anything, including people (rarely) and each other, not to mention all manner of wildlife.

The sexual proclivities of alligators, moreover, are enough to have made Malthus blush. Out of a large number of eggs laid (often around 100) by a female gator, it is estimated that six offspring survive to adulthood. A little simple arithmetic, assuming only a present population of 100,000 females, yields a possible population of billions in only ten years! Note that this is a possible result, but it is not probable for yet another principle of classical economics.

Smith was clearly on top of the alligator problem in the area of self-interested incentives. Paraphrasing Smith, preaching virtue in the presence of such self-interests do nothing, for they are a basic feature of our mortal stuff. Legislative tampering with or restricting of self-interest merely redirects it in undesirable and often unforeseen directions. In the gator case, increasing population and the federally-imposed hunting proscription have had several incentive effects. First, the enforcement of laws against poaching will become a large and expensive problem. The incentive to "poach" is heightened by the economic losses which farmers and ranchers are forced to sustain. Second, swamp owners whose land shelters a common property resource — alligators — will drain swamp land for pasture decreasing the long-run survival chances for the "endangered" species. There is a good deal of evidence that these private incentives are currently working in the Louisiana swamps.

At base, however, the alligator problem is only one example of a generally mindless legislative approach to wildlife conservation in America. Old Adam Smith would know the source of our failure quite well. The foundation of any market or social system, as he pointed out, was its legal system. In fact, one of the principal roles of government was to design a legal system wherein market decisions could produce desired results. Given a legal system, the market only reacts in a predictable manner, and the problems are visible in many areas. If it is costless to entrepreneurs to damage land by strip mining or conscious depletion of fertility, we can expect that situation. If a chemical manufacturer faces no legal and monetary consequences for polluting streams, i.e. if the private costs of this activity are zero, can we ordinarily expect him to voluntarily increase his own costs by proper waste disposal? The market system only works out the solu-

tion given the constraints put upon it.

In wildlife situations, as in the areas of air and water pollution, three types of property rights systems can be imagined: no property rights may exist, common property rights may be established by the courts and/or by the legislature or private property rights may be established. In the area of wildlife, Americans have seen the disappearance of certain species (the carrier pigeon, for example) and the decimation of others (the buffalo) when no property rights exist. But common property rights over game birds and endangered species, while perhaps better than none at all, have not resulted in optimal conservation. We have seen the pheasant largely disappear from the Midwest and the deer of New York state decimated under a system of common ownership, while game birds, including pheasant, thrive under private management in England and Scotland. Any U.S. hunter would happily pass up the opportunity to hunt on public land when given the same opportunity on private land. There are simply no incentives for the individual to conserve wildlife that is held in common, and public officials have little incentive to consider the future when faced with public pressure for longer hunting seasons and higher bag limits.

The "alligator problem" arose in the presence of a common property rights system, much as wild deer are handled in Texas. The owner of land on which alligators or deer thrive does not own the alligators or deer. They are in effect, common property. If he did own rights in the wildlife the owners would have every incentive to maintain his stock. Part of that incentive would be to enforce laws against poaching on private property (at largely private expense, one might add). Under such a system endangered animals would receive much protection and species would have the best chance of survival.

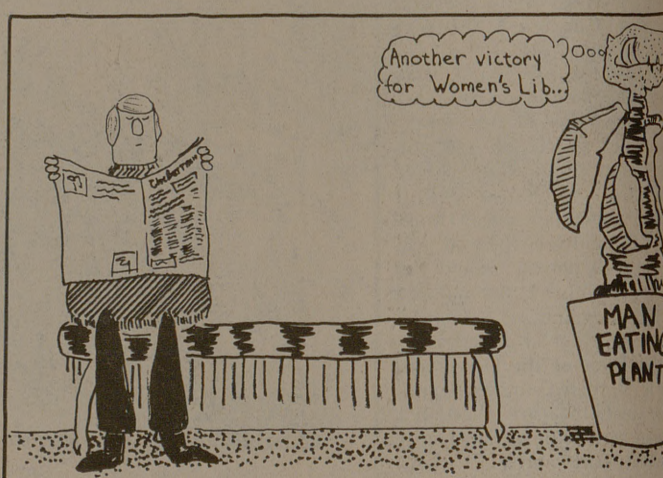
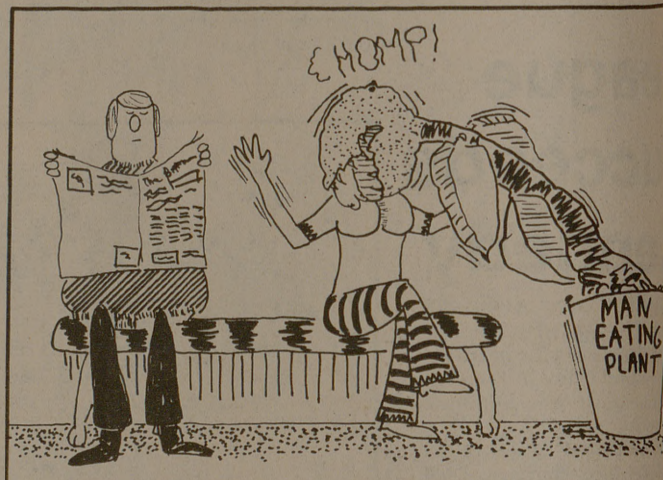
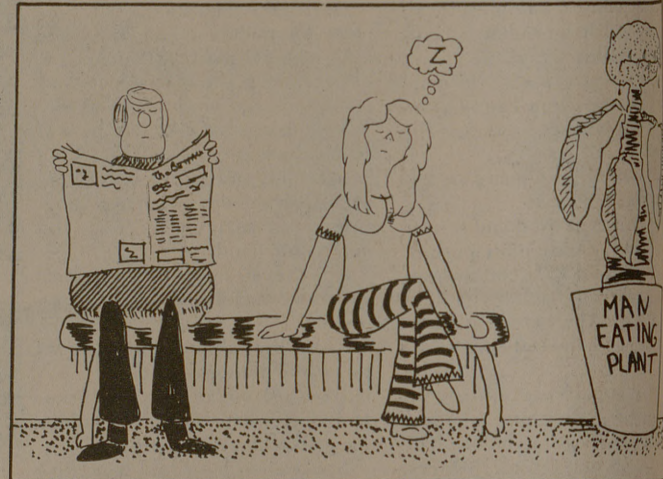
Though migratory animals present some special problems, alligators present a clear example of the advantages of a private-property rights system over a bureaucratically-directed common property system. Indeed, the market system is helping to consume alligators already in the alligator farms, some maintaining a population of 6,000 gators plus, have been established in the interest of profit-maximization. (Legally, it seems, hides can be sold abroad, but not in the U.S.)

The problem of wildlife preservation, as those of air and water pollution, is not due to a failure of laissez faire, but due to a failure of government to promulgate an imaginative legal system. The legislative solution to the alligator problem will simply not do; but, unfortunately,

we never seem to learn. We are not deterred by the fact that government cannot seem to deliver the mail, that domestic help and the poor — the very group which legislation is supposed to help — are put out of work by minimum wage laws, the ICC and CAB regulation of

transportation has cost the American public a bundle. Surely if Adam Smith were alive today, he would shudder to think what the bureaucratic reaction would be should foot, dinosaurs or other "dangered" behemoths be discovered.

### Coasters and Co. By Rodney Hammett



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