

## THE COMMISSIONER

Planning Tools/Law

### It takes a plan

The festival embraces the city's attitude toward its residents, no matter their age, ethnic background, or sexual orientation. There is no sense that a particular exhibit is too highbrow or too popular. Everyone participates at the same level—without barriers. That includes price: Everything is free. I toured with a five-year-old and a seven-year-old. What they loved and connected to, I did as well.

The festival organizers—including the city planning department—are clear that this is a party given by Barcelona, for the people of Barcelona. The mayor heads an 11-member commission—all elected officials—that functions as the executive branch. She appoints individual council members to oversee specific departments: culture, security, etc. They reject the typical planning inclination to justify the costs of a festival with multiple objectives; in other words, that it will attract tourists and promote local industries. The city gladly accepts donations, but it does not commodify the festival. Nowhere are you encouraged to buy a telephone or think kindly about an electrical company—the type of advertising that is so common in most municipal festivals. Its sole justification is a good time for the city's residents.

As I noted above, it is not easy to throw such a party. Barcelona's ability to coordinate city departments in closing streets, cleanup, providing security, and working with local businesses, residents, and institutions is impressive. Even more impressive to me is the city's ability to design and implement a plan that nurtures social trust. Thousands of residents come together every year in an unfamiliar part of Barcelona and have a great time for three consecutive nights. And for that, the city deserves credit. Clearly, it knows how to throw a party. ■

—Chuck Thurow

Thurow was formerly APA's assistant research director, deputy director of planning and development for the city of Chicago, and executive director of the of the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago.

## Annexation 101

**W**HEN CITIES SEEK TO EXPAND their boundaries, they typically turn to annexation, the process by which land is transferred from one unit of government to another, most commonly from a county to an incorporated city. Annexation serves many practical purposes: providing more efficient services, adding to the local population (and the tax base), providing areas for future growth, and extending planning and zoning authority. It can also be a controversial and politically contentious process.

Laws governing annexation authority and processes differ from state to state. Most require consent by a majority of landowners and residents in the proposed area. One common exception is when the territory to be annexed is surrounded by an incorporated municipality. A few states (including Texas, North Carolina, and Indiana) permit involuntary annexation. In Texas, home-rule cities may unilaterally annex any land that is under their extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Most states also require annexed areas to adjoin the existing municipal boundary. This requirement encourages orderly expansion and discourages cities from leapfrogging over less desirable parcels in order to annex land on the urban fringe.

Jurisdictions annex for various reasons. For example, a city might annex residential subdivisions, commercial or industrial areas, or undeveloped areas where growth is anticipated. Development in the annexed area can increase property and commercial tax bases and generate additional revenue to support city services and infrastructure development and maintenance that could benefit residents of the city and surrounding areas.

Annexation also allows a jurisdiction to fully extend its regulatory authority, including planning and zoning. The result may be more logical patterns of growth and development in the surrounding area.

### Important reminders

Cities should carefully consider the costs and benefits of pursuing annexation, how well it aligns with current goals for growth and development, and the full range of potential impacts that could result.

Any city considering annexation should document existing population figures, land uses, and development within the proposed boundaries of the growth area. It is also important to evaluate how annexation will affect the timing of new development, both within the annexed area and existing municipal boundaries.

Another issue is the likely demand for public services within the proposed annexed area. This may include police and fire protection, road improvements, water supply, and sewers, as well as schools, libraries, and parks. Communities should first evaluate the costs of extending services and determine whether they can be provided efficiently.

While annexation may expand the local tax base, the costs of providing services may exceed the tax revenue generated. Therefore, it is vital to conduct a thorough fiscal analysis at the proposal stage, including comparing likely property tax revenue, license fees, and other income associated with new development with projected service costs. The analysis should also consider whether the transfer will cause the jurisdiction currently governing the annexed area to lose revenue.

Finally, cities should consider potential political challenges, which could range from concerns about higher taxes, changes in political representation, and loss of community identity on one side, to reduction in levels of service and traffic congestion, to name a few, on the other. ■

—Anna Read, AICP

Read is an officer with the Broadband Research Initiative at the Pew Charitable Trusts.

This article is adapted from an APA Planning Advisory Service *QuickNotes* article. APA members may access the full *QuickNotes* archive free of charge at [planning.org/pas/quicknotes](http://planning.org/pas/quicknotes).