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# Introduction

It has been twelve years since the first edition of this book. In it I described Green Planning as a concept of great importance and a promising step toward solving environmental problems. Since then, the environmental programs of most nations have not kept pace with the growth of those problems, which are now capped off by the arrival of the huge threat of global warming. Nonetheless, I'm pleased to say that in certain countries, principally the Netherlands, Singapore, and New Zealand, Green Planning has shown exemplary success as a way to work toward social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

These past eighteen years of successful environmental management offer many valuable lessons to other nations, states, cities, corporations, and institutions that need to get on with environmental quality management. The purpose of this third edition is to describe the ongoing idea and show how it is working. To this project I bring the benefit of my own forty years of experience as an environmentalist and planner, as well as the work of the Resource Renewal Institute (RRI), which I founded in 1983 to study and promote Green Plans.

When I first looked at Green Plans as environmental policy, I thought the Dutch example was outstanding. I still do. Their plan, known as the NEPP, the National Environmental Policy Plan, has been functioning now for eighteen years. That length of time is important because for any program to be able to change a society's environmental policies on a Green Plan scale, the policy needs to survive over time. The eighteen years of Holland's successful Green Plan is the driving reason for the third edition of this book.

Recently, as I was pondering the reasons for that success, I received a note from one of the Dutch pioneers in Green Plan-

ning, who summarized in a nutshell why Green Plans have worked so well in the Netherlands. Among his key points are: leadership, long-term goals, short-term targets, scale, a level playing field, the integration of environment, economy, and land zoning, and participatory process. I'll be exploring and commenting on these and other factors contributing to the success of Green Plans in the course of this book.

While the success of Green Plans has been impressive, especially in the case of the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Singapore, it has not been universal. Canada's Green Plan, for example, has evaporated. But valuable lessons can also be learned from examples of failure.

For me, the most difficult part of thinking about and writing this update is watching the lack of progress of the Green Plan idea in the United States. When a governor in one state launched it, his successor ignored it and let the beginning effort toward a Green Plan wilt. That doesn't mean that a great deal wasn't accomplished here and there, but we cannot today see anywhere in the United States a program of the needed scale, much less duration, required to solve our own environmental problems.

So, you might ask, why Green Plans? The examples of Holland and New Zealand and Singapore prove that in order to solve the environmental problem, you have to solve the *whole* problem, not selected parts. Green Plans approach the problem in a way in which we have never approached it before, this time in a serious effort to *solve* it. Green Plans are about believing that we can put the problem behind us, as we put polio behind us—and in the process, find that we all benefit when we work together.

Green Plans are about rescuing the concept of planning from the scrap heap of history. Planning seemed so good and so important back in the 1950s and 1960s, but then it simply became an excuse for not making a political decision, and the enthusiasm for it faded abruptly. The elected, decision-making body, to avert political pressure, would continue to request study after

study until the project was deemed to be unworkable and the applicant would just “go away.” I realize now that, in terms of the environment, the difficulty with planning was that we were not looking at the problem on a large enough scale. We did not have a structure that was comprehensive enough to do what had to be done—that is, to approach the problem with the intention of solving it.

After eighteen years, Green Plans show what planning can and should be. They are comprehensive, integrated, and large scale—three characteristics that are central to solving environmental problems, whether on the local, regional, or national level. I have studied endless alternatives and read what now seem to be thousands of proposals and philosophical discourses, all discussing topics related to this central dilemma of declining environmental quality. But in all those documents, I do not remember one, other than Green Plans, that looked at the issue in terms of its actual scale and complexity, taking into consideration the entire set of relationships between air, soil, water, plants, animals, and people.

The individual pieces that go into making up any country’s Green Plan are not revolutionary; most are not even new. What is so radical about what Green Plan countries are doing is the scope of their vision, the fact that they have pulled together all the related pieces into one package.

The point is that by creating an integrated approach, these countries have solved virtually all their local environmental problems. Because Green Plans are comprehensive, no one popular issue, such as wilderness preservation, rainforests, or toxics, dominates the overall strategy. An advantage of large scale is that each issue is an important part of the whole, and each gains more authority *because* it is part of a larger plan.

All the different issues and their constituencies are forged into an apolitical coalition that has as its goal the resolution of all problems. As a result, more people can relate to the many interests, and the plan gains popular and political support.

People take hope from such a large-scale effort because they can see that their government is serious in its commitment. The threat is thus turned into an asset, bringing people together and helping them to put conflict behind them. People are willing to make small sacrifices when they can see how big the payoff will be—a livable future for their grandchildren—and when they understand that their entire society is working toward the same end.

Green Plan nations have accepted that natural resources are a complex, interrelated system and that any real environmental plan must be comprehensive enough to embrace that complexity. They have made environmental recovery their top priority and have set into motion large-scale efforts guided by the government and involving all segments of society. Their businesses and industries are thriving as a result. Whole societies have been improved. Green Plans are based on the critically important premise that our social and economic well-being depends on a healthy environment, and that we must manage our natural and physical environment in a sustainable fashion if we want to continue to meet our own needs and to allow future generations to meet theirs.

Such a dream, of course, requires focused, disciplined hard work, including the political work of selling the idea and involving people as a force. Only the people can cause government to make environmental recovery its first priority. This shift in priorities is essential: environmental recovery is a matter of survival. We have the technical knowledge and the resources to accomplish it, but in order to do so we must make it a priority, as we have in the past for bombs and rockets and space vehicles.

In summary, I offer this book in praise of Green Plans, to show what they are, how they have succeeded, and to serve as a central source of information for politicians, planners, students, activists, and anyone else interested in solving the environmental problem.

CHAPTER  
ONE

## A Commitment to Change

The hour may be late, but there is nothing that says that it is too late. There is nothing in man's plight that his vision, if he cared to cultivate it, and his will, if he cared to exercise it, could not alleviate. The challenge is to see what could be done and then have the heart and resolution to attempt it. —*George Kennan*

Despite the perilous state of our planetary environment, from climate change to the energy crisis, comprehensive environmental planning—Green Planning—as practiced in certain forward-looking countries is today bringing efficiency, cost reduction, and overall effectiveness to a wide variety of organizations including businesses, universities, churches, and others. In the process, it is contributing to a healthier life, a more vital and diverse natural world, the preservation of the resource base of our global economy and future development, and ultimately to our collective security. The success of comprehensive envi-

ronmental planning can already be seen in the examples of a number of countries, several of which I will be discussing in this book, whose progress represents a large-scale advance toward solving humanity's environmental problems. These examples demonstrate that by working together, with imagination and innovation, problems can be solved at affordable costs, for the benefit of everyone.

#### AWAKENING FROM THE INDUSTRIAL DREAM

In this postindustrial age, we have come to realize that the great dream of the industrial age, delivering comfort and quantity to everybody, at prices they can afford, has brought along with it unexpected problems: pollution, environmental decline, degradation of nature, loss of species, and health risk to ourselves.

In the past, when the problems caused by these activities became too extreme to ignore, as when the air became too dirty to breathe or the water too polluted to drink, or a river became so choked with toxins it actually caught fire, we attempted to clean up—discovering in the process that it is better and cheaper to prevent the problems in the first place. But often, we ignored warnings about pollution and overexploitation, and as a result, have pushed some resources beyond their capacity to recover. In some areas, where there were formerly productive resource-based industries, people can no longer find food or work.

Now, as industries have grown up and populations have increased and the needs of these new millions have spurred industries to even greater growth, the pressures on the environment have reached the tipping point. Problems are no longer local but regional and continental. The current attention to global warming is awakening us to the realization that what we do can affect the entire planet. We see images now that would have seemed impossible a short time ago. The polar ice caps are melt-

ing and the polar bears face extinction. The oceans themselves are dying. The Mediterranean fisheries, once so prolific, are depleted. The Pacific Coast fishery of North America, once home to a thriving sardine industry employing twenty-five thousand people in California alone, also has diminished. Now, we can look back to the novels of John Steinbeck to remind us of humanity's impact on a once-great resource.

We've arrived at this point because over the years people of influence and leaders of industry refused to acknowledge that environmental problems were real. Over the past fifty years, these leaders, who were and are the economic voices of the nation, fought tooth and nail against what they perceived as a threat to their dream, their own prosperity. Their driving motive is always the bottom line, the quarterly corporate report. These short-term corporate financial statements, whether they are meant to do so or not, run the economy. And that reality impacts the long-term health of the environment. Now, the bottom line is health and life itself.

Another part of the problem is that government leadership in the United States has not been active enough, nor has Congress given industry incentives to adopt a new management approach to prevent pollution from continuing to spill out into the landscape, poisoning streams, rivers, oceans, land, and air. When incentives were proposed they were usually argued against in court or government scientists would try to downplay the serious nature of the problems.

Some enlightened companies are working toward change, but others, fossil fuel industries, for example, are making a profit as things are now, and that's their interest, period. The old guard industrial leaders will say a free hand (deregulation) is necessary for healthy competition and prosperity. And while that may be true to a degree, experience is teaching us that such freedom has to include environmental management, otherwise, life as we know it is going to be lost. And that is unacceptable.

## WHAT ARE WE TO DO ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS?

The Netherlands mobilized its environmental program in 1988, following a warning by Queen Beatrix in her annual Christmas speech. She told the Dutch people that the future of life itself could be at stake, leaving little doubt that their society, if it was to survive, had to change. Some members of industry, instead of resisting, as they had been, joined in to assume cooperative leadership. This in itself was a huge, powerful change. The companion marvels were the support of the labor movement, the involvement of the Dutch Parliament, and finally, the involvement of the nonprofit environmental community, which served a very important watchdog role. Even though the entire business community didn't jump on board immediately, enough did so that they were able to set a framework for change and establish programs that have become the foremost example of successful comprehensive environmental planning in the world.

IF THE DUTCH COULD DO IT,  
WHY HASN'T THIS HAPPENED IN THE  
UNITED STATES AND ELSEWHERE?

In the past we have always looked at one issue at a time, usually those advanced by a narrow special interest, passing air pollution legislation one year, devoting some funding to endangered species the next. But this piecemeal approach has not worked. The example of the Netherlands, and others, has shown us that a comprehensive approach works. They have shown that efficient management, focused on the shared goal of environmental health, can put our new organizational and technological knowledge to work in a way that leads to a healthy, sustainable society. This kind of management enables business not to be nailed to the letter of every page of detailed prescriptive legislation but, by establishing long-term targets and performance standards, to be able to set priorities and align necessary actions with the business cycle.

To advocate this new approach is not to belittle the extraordinarily valuable efforts made by so many people for so many years in fields as diverse as science, agriculture, technology, and finance. That we are now able to make a leap forward to put things into a better functioning whole is due in large part to their work. It is also due to the work of those who have sought to wake people up to the environmental crisis. Much of the world now accepts the seriousness of the problems we face, particularly with regard to global warming and air pollution, and is ready to undertake the major efforts necessary to halt and reverse the worldwide environmental damage.

However, even in Holland, over the years, environmental concerns have lost their ranking in the public eye. At this writing, the environment is about fourteenth on a list of fifteen priorities. People are on the one hand satisfied about progress, yet at the same time they say more stringent policies would be welcomed. Global warming and air pollution are their main concerns.

#### THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Because it is so new, the idea of solving the entire problem of environmental decline may sound impossible to many people: How can we solve the entire problem if we cannot even solve the smaller, individual issues? But that is precisely the power of a big-picture approach. By tackling the larger problem, you carry along a host of smaller ones. And by taking a longer time horizon, you have more flexibility and more time to set priorities that do not change from year to year, leaving problems unresolved. Rather, people get to decide within that larger time frame when changes best fit in.

I've observed this principle working in the political arena. For example, opposition to ideas within the legislative process traditionally focuses on the one theme the lobbyist or opposing advocate is paid to oppose. If that one item is expanded, say

from a single water matter, such as the price of a cubic-foot-per-second flow, to a package of water related issues including the one the opponent is to oppose, they often will let the package go. I first observed this when an opponent of a water bill suddenly recognized that the broadened proposal included a provision that would improve fishing. He was a fisherman. Realizing the bill would help maintain a healthy fish stock, he switched his opposition to support for the package.

Comprehensive plans are the only way to solve large-scale problems. They reach beyond the individual issues to the problems created by the relationships *between* those issues. The reality of ecology is that we cannot solve the individual problems unless we include the relationships of each to the others. Within the comprehensive scale, even powerful, single-interest advocates such as my fisherman friend, can realize something positive. This is another reason why social, political, and economic factors need to be combined when planning improvement in environmental policy.

#### FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY

In this comprehensive kind of thinking, one of the certainties is that some of the smaller parts will develop unpredictable problems. If all you're looking at is one part at a time, and that part develops a problem, you are likely to drill down into it and lose sight of the goal. So the importance of comprehensive thinking is that you keep a wide view and allow for the wandering possibilities of one or more of the problems within the whole to go awry and be corrected.

At the same time, individual successes lend strength to the whole. I've observed that when several individual concepts are banded together, they have tremendous power, much more than they would if standing alone. But to get there, people need to break out of certain narrow structures. This is difficult. It's almost a fact of human existence that whatever our experience is,