

In the depression decade of the 1930s the states instituted “little New Deals.” These were agencies and programs that paralleled, cooperated with, and assisted the federal agencies and programs designed to bring about relief, recovery, and reform. The early years of the Nevada State Planning Board offer an example of such an operation.

The roots of the Planning Board are found in federal programs. In 1933 the National Planning Board of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (FEAPW), headed by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, urged state governments to establish planning boards. In Nevada, Acting Governor Morley Griswold, in January of 1934, appointed seven men to serve as the State Planning Board. Lacking funds and a legislative basis, it was not an effective body.

On June 30, 1934, under the authority of the National Industrial Recovery Act, Executive Order 6777 created the National Resources Board, successor of the National Planning Board of FEAPW (later renamed the Public Works Administration). Executive Order 7065, June 7, 1935, abolished the National Resources Board and created the National Resources Committee (NRC).[1]

Ickes, who was also chairman of the NRC, renewed his recommendation that the states establish planning boards to work in conjunction with the NRC. Nevada’s Governor Richard Kirman, Sr. responded by appointing six men to serve as an interim planning board, pending a statutory basis. The Board elected Robert A. Allen as chairman at its first meeting, February 5, 1935. Allen (1886-1986) was at that time the State Engineer for the federal Public Works Administration (PWA) and soon to become Nevada’s State Highway Engineer.

That year, on March 28, the Legislature passed an act creating the State Board of Relief, Work Planning, and Pension Control. The statute mostly addressed matters pertaining to poor relief, but section 3 (7) required the agency to “act as a state planning board in making inventories and surveys of state resources and in outlining land, water and work projects and policies.” Section 5 provided for a 3-person advisory board, at least two of which were to be “competent civil, mining or electrical engineers.”



**Figure 1: Key Pittman, US Senator from Nevada; Richard Kirman, Sr., Nevada Governor; and Pat McCarran, US Senator from Nevada, 1938. The three Nevada leaders met in the Governor's Office prior to a meeting of the Colorado River Commission. Courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.**

The comprehensive statutory basis desired by the Governor and the Board came in 1937, when the Legislature established the State Planning Board. It was to be composed of eleven members, eight of whom were to be appointed by the Governor. The other three were members ex officio: the Governor, State Engineer, and State Highway Engineer. They were to serve without compensation, except for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. The Board’s powers and duties were:

- (a) To make a comprehensive state plan for the economic and social development of the State.... To this end, it shall conduct research and studies relating to natural resources and to other factors in the progress of the state.
- (b) To submit reports and to make recommendations...to the governor and the legislature.
- (c) To cooperate with other departments and agencies of the state in their planning efforts and to advise and cooperate with municipal, county, and other local planning commissions....

The statute further authorized the Board “to participate in interstate, regional, and national planning projects...and...to confer and cooperate with federal officials and with the executive, legislative, or planning authorities of neighboring states....” The lawmakers appropriated only \$1000 dollars for the new

agency, but empowered the Board “to receive and accept...grants of money or services to enable it to carry on its work....” The last provision apparently referred to anticipated federal assistance.

Without adequate state funds of its own, the Board depended upon aid from other Nevada agencies in order to carry out its responsibilities. Allen’s Highway Department was especially supportive, providing office space, clerical assistance, transportation, and stationery. The National Resources Committee assigned a part-time consultant to the Planning Board. Funds from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and other federal programs supported much of the Board’s early planning activity.

The Board made studies and prepared plans for projects in several areas: utilization of power from Hoover Dam; mining, including construction of custom mills, sampling plants, and smelters; soil erosion control; water conservation and flood control; reclamation; recreational areas and parks; the highway system and feeder roads; improvement of agriculture; new school buildings; and public works to relieve unemployment. Chairman Allen assigned the members to committees to study and report on potential projects. In the spirit of the New Deal, federal and state authorities, along with private interests, encouraged the Planning Board to think expansively and imaginatively. Federal agencies, such as the WPA, PWA, and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) implemented many of the proposals. So too did state agencies. In the first years of its existence the Board worked closely with the NRC and, as with the planning boards of the other states, may be considered an adjunct of it.

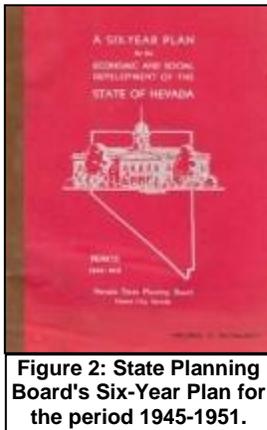


Figure 2: State Planning Board's Six-Year Plan for the period 1945-1951.

In collaboration with the State Park Commission and with the cooperation of the National Park Service, the Board, in 1938, issued an 80-page publication entitled Park, Parkway and Recreational Area Study. In April of 1941 the Planning Board published the first of its six-year plans (the Board revised later six-year plans at two-year intervals). Because of wartime priorities, consideration of the proposals was delayed. Subsequent six-year plans were published up to 1955-1961. Thereafter the Board issued its recommended program every biennium.

The Legislature, in 1945, made a significant addition to the duties of the Board. It was now to provide “engineering and architectural service” to all state departments and institutions responsible for constructing state buildings. The service was to consist of preliminary planning, designs, and cost estimates. These were to be submitted to “qualified architects for preparation of detailed plans and specifications.” The Board was given the power of final approval of

“all building, plans, designs, type of construction, and design of landscaping.” The agency was further made responsible, after the letting of the contracts, for inspecting the construction of the buildings. The act repeated the sections of the 1937 statute requiring the Board to make “a comprehensive state plan for the economic and social development of the State,” to submit reports and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and to cooperate with other state agencies and local planning commissions.

After World War II the Planning Board launched an ambitious program to renovate several state buildings and to construct National Guard armories, hospitals, an administration building for the Department of Health, and buildings for the University of Nevada. An act of 1947 allowed the Board, when it saw fit, to submit its preliminary plans and designs to qualified architects and engineers “for preparation of detailed plans and specifications,” the cost of which services to be charged against the legislative appropriations for new state buildings or projects. The act gave the Board responsibility for soliciting bids and the letting of contracts “for new construction or major repairs.” The Board was to submit reports and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and to recommend “the priority of construction” of authorized or proposed construction work.

A report issued by the Legislative Counsel Bureau in 1947 criticized the Planning Board. According to the LCB, the Board should not have elected Highway Engineer Robert A. Allen as chairman: “If the planning board theory were carried out properly, the board itself would make the decisions rather than provide yes-service to the Highway Engineer. The Highway Engineer, or any other engineer, should be a subordinate of the board.” As for Allen’s many and varied duties (he was also the Superintendent of State Parks,

head of the Driver's License Division, and a member of the State Board of Publicity) the report questioned the Legislature's wisdom in giving Allen "these unrelated tasks.... There is a limit to the responsibilities that may be given any one man. Or perhaps, the word is power."

In the postwar years the Board often acted as a de facto state information agency, responding to outside inquiries about the state and its resources. To promote Nevada's image, the Board prepared and operated the state's exhibits at the Utah Centennial Exposition, 1947, and the Century of Progress in Railroad Transportation Exposition, held the following year in Chicago.

It was also apparent by this time that the agency was no longer primarily a fact-finding and advisory body with a broad mandate to produce plans for a wide variety of state activities. Instead, by the late 1940s its primary duties were to plan and oversee the state's capital improvements. This entailed the construction of new facilities, and repairs for and additions to existing structures. Over the next several years the Legislature authorized the Planning Board to draw up plans and solicit bids for the construction or renovation of public buildings, among them state hospitals and correctional facilities, University of Nevada structures, and state office buildings.



**Figure 3: Architect's concept for new engineering building for the University of Nevada, Reno, campus in 1959. The architects were DeLongchamps & O'Brien and Alegre & Harrison. When completed, the building was named Scrugham Engineering after Nevada Governor James G. Scrugham.**

A statute of 1955 required boards of trustees of all school districts to submit to the Planning Board for approval all plans for new school buildings. Legislation of 1961 authorized the Board to contract with the federal government to receive funds. That same year saw the creation of the State Planning Board Option Fund, from which moneys could be drawn to obtain rights to purchase real property "or interest therein." A 1963 act made the Planning Board responsible for periodically inspecting and reporting upon all state buildings. In 1965 the Legislature declared it state policy that "all construction of public buildings upon the property of the state or held in trust for any division of the state government be supervised by, and final authority for its completion and acceptance be vested in, the State Planning Board." This law also compelled the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada to use the Board's planning services in the construction of its buildings. In 1969 the Legislature authorized the agency to acquire property through eminent domain.

In keeping with the agency's changed functions, an act of 1973 renamed it appropriately the Public Works Board. By then the Planning Board had long since ceased to be an agency with a broad mandate to devise comprehensive plans for the social and economic future of the state. The statute transferred such planning responsibilities to the Governor. To assist him the post of State Planning Coordinator was created by appropriations acts of 1973. Governor Mike O'Callaghan's Executive Order of May 23 of that year defined the Planning Coordinator's duties. The Coordinator was also to sit as one of the ten members of the Public Works Board.

## State Planning Board - Bibliography

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United States. National Resources Committee. State Planning: Programs and Accomplishments (Supplementing State Planning Report of 1935). December 1936. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937.

### Related Manuscripts collections:

Robert A. Allen Papers. Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Allen was for many years chairman of the State Planning Board. About the only material relating directly to the Nevada State Planning Board is correspondence, 1940-1943, in folder 309.

Robert A. (Robert Alva) Allen Papers. Special Collections Department, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno. 1893-1960. 5 cubic feet. Contains only materials related to Allen's professional career. Online collection finding aid available at: <http://www.library.unr.edu/specoll/mss/NC97.html>

### Related Records in The National Archives:

Record Group 187. Records of the National Resources Planning Board.