

Is there life after MPD 2021?

Apart from the other problems with Delhi's new Master Plan, the biggest flaw is that it assumes certain areas are available for development when in fact they are not, says Shreekanth Gupta

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not themselves be realised.

—Daniel H Burnham, 19th century American architect and urban planner

All previous efforts in city planning have been limited by a narrow-focused project approach.

—Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, launching the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, December 2005

Now that the dust has settled on the notification earlier this month of the Master Plan for Delhi (MPD), it is time to ask, what next? Of course, this is not really a new plan as sometimes erroneously believed, but the second modification of the original 1962 plan (MPD '62) which remains, in effect, the first and only comprehensive planning exercise undertaken in modern Delhi. Much ink has been expended on debating the minutiae of MPD 2021, particularly issues such as mixed use. But, what has not been understood or acknowledged is that the credibility of the planning exercise itself is presently at stake. Today, Delhi finds itself plagued by illegal constructions, widespread encroachments on public land, failing infrastructure and ineffective service mechanisms, and a variety of local bodies and agencies working in a haphazard manner, their dealings with the public compromised by rampant corruption and vested interests. So how exactly (if at all) do we attain the vision, *a la* MPD 2021, of making Delhi a "global metropolis and world class city"? Any plan is a blueprint of 'how' we get from 'here' to 'there'. If we are in denial of where we are 'now' then the 'how' to get to 'there' becomes a meaningless exercise.

One of the chronic problems with the planning process conducted by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has been the disjunction between the ground realities and the coding of the land use plan (LUP) which continues to represent planned usage rather than actual usage of land. For example, the land released due to changes of land use (in industrial and wholesale trade areas) should be represented in the LUP for MPD 2021, but is not. To gauge the likely effectiveness of MPD 2021, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), a New Delhi-based think tank, has studied the ground realities of Delhi in its recent document, *A Perspective Plan for*



BINAY

Delhi—Delhi beyond MPD 2021. It has prepared a base map of the ground conditions in Delhi as seen through satellite images. The base map reveals that almost 60 per cent of the total land area of NCT Delhi (148,300 hectares) has been built up. So, if you go by the projections of "urbanisable area" given by the DDA in MPD 2021, there is no scope for further urbanisation in Delhi!

It can also be said with considerable certainty that covert land transactions have already been conducted and land that seems to be under agricultural use is in fact awaiting the expansion of the municipal limits (vide MPD 2021) and the post-facto 'authorisation' of illegal development. Thus, in 2007 Delhi bears little resemblance to what was envisaged in the LUP of MPD '62 and its amended versions. More than 75 per cent of urban development in the city is in violation of the Master Plan. DDA's land use plan is an abstraction in that it matches reality only in terms of the road network and the layout of planned colonies. The reality that it creates on ground is what governs the quality of life in the city. A stark example is the area at the northern tip of east Delhi, which is actually built up but is shown as a green belt. In the south-west, the mini city of Najafgarh (an area at least 5 km by 5 km) is shown as vacant space in the LUP! In all such situations it would be more meaningful to indicate actual land use. A similar situation also exists at the level of Zonal Plans—for Zone C (Civil Lines), for instance, marshy land near the Coronation Memorial in the north has been shown as commercial in the LUP for this zone.

Unlike the LUP for MPD 2021, which charts out recommended densities for each part of the city, NIUA's base map suggests that density can (and should) vary greatly across the whole city and within each locality as well. Therefore, planning norms and development controls must

Continued--

be responsive to the need for flexibility in the assignment of densities to different municipal wards. Master plans should focus on vision, goals, objectives and frameworks, but not on the direct regulation of development. Unlike the micro-management oriented MPD 2021, master plans typically do not include development controls (DCs). Master plans derive their influence because latter steps in the development process need to be consistent with them, not because they have direct regulatory force. DCs are too detailed to be included in the plan, and the DC documents are often as long as—or longer than—the plan document. No wonder that MPD 2021, littered as it is with DC norms, is more a throwback to the inspector raj than a modern, clean and crisp vision and a policy document for building a world class city!

In lieu of an incorrect and meaningless LUP (where land use planning is itself an outdated concept), in its Perspective Plan for Delhi, NIUA has proposed the use of the more modern planning concept, namely, a *physical development plan*, which charts out the key factors that influence the development of the city as a sustainable entity. These key factors such as transport corridors, the existing coverage of built up areas, greens and water bodies are indicated on the base map that forms the basis for the articulation of NIUA's Key Plan for Delhi. The Key Plan lays out the basic strategy thus:

■ There is very little land available in east, central and south Delhi for new development. The existing built-up area will be treated as a combination of conservation and redevelopment areas.

■ Agricultural land on southwest, west, northwest and north Delhi will be reserved for acquisition by government and/or

private developers. There is enough land for complete townships as long as they are self-sufficient in all ways.

■ New development is to be along the transportation corridors on the west and the northwest, and between these corridors.

■ A southwest parkway will skirt along the boundary of the city to the south, west and north, and the gap between the parkway and the border will be created as a green belt through afforestation; eventually accommodating a variety of existing uses like residential (*village abadis*) and for future needs such as wetlands and recreation (zoological park).

■ DDA will complete the development of the three urban extensions, namely, within the 11th and 12th Five Year Plan periods, after which its role as a developer in Delhi will cease.

■ The Delhi Metro, even in its full extent, will only service about 50 per cent of the area of the city. The remaining area will have to be serviced by other means, which need to be charted out immediately.

This approach would be in tune with modern ways of thinking about planning cities and a paradigm shift from the outdated land use planning in vogue in Delhi. But bringing about a change in the mindset of DDA's planners will not be easy. Since, however, the DDA Act contradicts the provisions of the 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India, the planning function could

be hived off from DDA—under Article 243W (12th schedule) of the 74th Amendment, urban local bodies (ULBs) should have the responsibility for urban planning including town planning. If this comes to pass, and having already fulfilled its role as a land developer, DDA would become superfluous and could be wound up as provided for in Section 59 of the Delhi Development Act of 1957 itself.

The area at the northern tip of east Delhi is shown as a green belt even though it is actually built up — there are a host of such examples

NIUA's Perspective Plan for Delhi is available at www.niua.org

The author is faculty at the Delhi School of Economics and former Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs. He can be reached at sgupta@econedse.org